



LEISURE HOUR SERIES

MISTRESS JUDITH

BY

FRASER-TYTLER

HENRY HOLT & CO. PUBLISHERS

New York





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LEISURE HOUR SERIES

MISTRESS JUDITH

A CAMBRIDGESHIRE STORY

BY

C. C. FRASER-TYTLER

AUTHOR OF "JASMINE LEIGH," ETC.



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CONTENTS.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. MASTER HURST, ...	1
II. PARSON INGREY WALKS ABROAD, ...	10
III. MISTRESS JUDITH IS NOT MOULDED, ...	18
IV. "THERE'S A BOY,"	26
V. MISTRESS JUDITH IS NOT SHAMED, ...	34
VI. MISTRESS JUDITH HAS NO BIRTHDAY, ...	46
VII. EIGHT YEARS AFTER, ...	53
VIII. WHY JESSE CHANGED HIS MIND, ...	63
IX. UNDER THE PORCH WITH AMOS, ...	71
X. JESSE BULLEN'S LETTER, ...	79
XI. ANOTHER LETTER, ...	87
XII. HASLINGTON FEAST, ...	96
XIII. HARVESTING, ...	107
XIV. GLEANING, ...	117
XV. CHURCH, ...	127
XVI. FIRST IMPRESSIONS, ...	136
XVII. AMOS STRIKES, ...	146
XVIII. GOOD-BYE AND NO GOOD-BYE, ...	155
XIX. PERPLEXITY, AND PAXTON DICK, ...	167

CHAP.	PAGE
XX. THE LETTER THAT WENT TO AMOS, . . .	176
XXI. "THE GLOAMING OF THE YEAR," . . .	185
XXII. PARSON INGREY'S PROMISE, . . .	194
XXIII. AMOS IS COMING, . . .	203
XXIV. A CHRISTMAS SECRET, . . .	212
XXV. ST. VALENTINE'S DAY, . . .	219
XXVI. WAITING FOR TIDINGS, . . .	228
XXVII. GENTLEMAN BULLEN COMES HOME, . . .	237
XXVIII. MID-HEAVEN, . . .	245
XXIX. PRIMROSE-SPINNEY, . . .	253
XXX. SOMETHING FOR AMOS, . . .	261
XXXI. "THE LOVE-LIGHT IN HIS EYES," . . .	267
XXXII. SHADOWS, . . .	277
XXXIII. JESSE'S TROUBLES, . . .	283
XXXIV. THE CLOUDING OF THE SKY, . . .	289
XXXV. HARVESTING AGAIN, . . .	297
XXXIV. MASTER HURST GOES, . . .	303
XXXVII. THE BLOW FALLS, . . .	310
XXXVIII. HOW THE "BLEE" WENT, . . .	314
XXXIX. "TIN-KETTLING," . . .	323
XL. A HOME-COMING, . . .	332
XLI. THE END, . . .	337

CHAPTER I.

MASTER HURST.

“ I DON'T think you 'll live very long, Master Hurst ; do you ? ”

“ I don't think so neither, my dear.”

There was a long pause.

“ I don't know what I'll do when you go, Master Hurst. They'll take you away and put you in a bury-hole, and then God'll take you up to Heaven, —if you're a *good man*, Master Hurst. *Are you a good man*, dear Master Hurst ? ”

“ I bean't a good man, my dear ; not I. I done a many bad things in my day, I have. But the Lord's very kind, my dear, that He is. The wicked 'Un, he comes a-wanting of me and a-telling of me to follow him. But, No, no, says I ; I bean't a-going to foller you, says I. And then I prays, I does. O yes, I prays, my dear. But the bad 'Un, he's a sharp 'un ; he'll come again, tempt 'un away, put a thought in o' his own. ‘ Look at the cabbages ! ’ says he. ‘ Look out for your

missus !' says he. Anything as'll take me away from summut *good*, you see." And Master Hurst, moving his swollen foot and leg with both hands, and fixing his eyes upon it, went on shaking his head, and muttering, "O yes, he do! O yes, he do, my dear!" while the child beside him listened with open eyes, and both hands rolled in her pinafore behind her back.

It is a cottage garden in which they are standing. The village is thin and straggling, on either side a broad high road. About its beauty people must judge for themselves. A crown of swaying poplars, seen for many a mile round, mark out the village from its neighbours: there is a slight undulation (to the left as you enter), upon which stands the village church. A little to the left of that, but closer to the road, you may see a thatched and gabled house, a little larger than those around it. It is enclosed in its own garden by a hedge of privet and a wicket-gate.

The cottage and garden, which have been the property of Master Hurst and his father for a hundred years and more, are just opposite this larger house. The little wicket-gate is standing open, and out of it Master Hurst's visitor has come.

She is well used to the short crossing on the dusty road, this quiet little maiden of five summers. Cold and wet, shower or sun, she trips it lightly to and fro, carrying sunshine, leaving sunshine, be the weather what it will.

Mistress Hurst goes out to do odd jobs for the neighbours. To use her own words, she "'arns a livin'"s best she may." She is "al'ays straightforward," and "does her duty," and people has a "kind o' respeck for her, you see, which she don't deny."

She is a good deal younger than her husband, though full fifty now; but what oppresses her more than the disparity in years is the difference between her own and her husband's moral and religious status.

"Al'ays" doing her duty—letting certain old debts of poor neighbours stand over—being straightforward—'arning her livin'—reading a chapter every day—no wonder Mistress Hurst not only fills the hearts of her neighbours with respect, but her own with a large allowance of self-approbation and esteem.

Only she should hide it more gracefully from her weaker partner.

"I ain't a-going to deceive you, nor no one, my

dear," she says, when the child-visitor plies her again with the oft-repeated question whether Master Hurst is a good man. "There's Master Hurst, he is—he done a many wrong things in's day, he has—he's displeased th' Almighty many times, he has."

"But God'll forgive him, won't He, Mrs. Hurst?"

"Well, there—you see I doan't know, I'm sure, my dear, as how about that—he's done a many——"

"But God'll forgive Master Hurst, if he asks Him, won't He?"

"O yes, my dear."

"Well, then, he *should* ask Him," said the child emphatically, as she hurried away.

And Master Hurst shook his old head, with a smile on his mouth and a tear in his eye, at the wonderful sayings of his child-teacher.

This child-teacher is little Mistress Judith Ingrey, aged five years. And she is the Parson's only child. She has lost her mother long ago, before she had even opened those large blue eyes, turned now so curiously on her whitehaired scholar. She is growing up "anyhow," as it were, without teaching or training. Half her days she spends at old Hurst's cottage, half her days she sleeps snugly

in a crib at home. Even when her "Good night, dear Master Hurst!" in sweet childish tones, has rung through the rafters, even when the old trembling hand has been lifted from its evening blessing of the silky head, sun-bonneted, and raised with pouting lips to his face—even then Mistress Judith has not taken her last farewell.

For not many minutes after the patter of little feet across the road has passed, a child's voice comes musically nearer and nearer. It mounts as if it were going heavenward, it falls and rises as if the stair of heaven wound circling up to God.

Now it comes nearer surely. The lattice in the gabled end opens. The little head, without the sun-bonnet, looks out. A shock of hair, fired by the sunset, crowns her like an aureole.

"Good night, Master Hurst!" calls the same voice we know, only grown shriller by the distance.

"Good night, little mistress, my dear," answers a quavering echo across the way, and a silver aureole vies with the golden.

He sees a little white-robed figure, framed in by the lattice, and the dark room behind her, a pair of dimpled hands resting on the window-sill, a pink foot coming gingerly out beside them, while their

owner glances slyly over her shoulder to see how far she may, and dare.

The foot has just touched the stone below the window, and the little toes, like so many sensitive plants, curl up because the thatch has touched them. A cry of triumph is on her lips when— (Master Hurst is prepared for it, but we are not) another cry, and not of triumph—a sudden snatch, a sudden disappearance of child and night-gown, a sudden bang of the lattice-window.

It is a short sharp cry of disappointment that we hear. We all know the cry or the fate that prompts it.

Would to God we all knew the sweet deep sleep that hushed that cry upon the pouting lips of Mistress Judith Ingrey !

.
Morning after morning, in the quiet village of Haslington, broke upon the rosy face of the little girl, laid on its snow-white pillow. Morning after morning, rubbing her sleepy blue eyes with her fists, she turned, half-awake half-dreaming, to the old servant Ruth, who stood beside her, and asked—
“Is Master Hurst come out, Ruth?”

“Eh! ch! what hast to do with Master Hurst for ever and a day? Come and see for th'self at 'e window.”

And then she was carried to the broad window-seat, where, leaning out upon her dimpled hands, she cried shrilly—

“Good morning, dear Master Hurst? Is the mustard come up yet?”

“No, no, mistress.”

“Is the bees making honey yet?”

“Ay, this hour past. If Ruth’ll let thee come over——”

“Ruth’ll *not* let her—not this half hour.” And the stout country woman scrubbed the sponge round the child’s face, closing up the blue eyes, and twitched on the clothes that lay in a heap beside her, with more zeal and hardihood than her promise of not letting her go for half an hour seemed to render necessary.

Meantime Master Hurst would totter to and fro, till his “missus” had prepared his breakfast.

Just as they were seated a gentle rap-tap would come at the door.

“Please open the door! it’s Mistress Judith!”

“Bless her soul, so I will!” And while Master Hurst’s face broke out into a tender smile of welcome, his wife would bustle to the rickety door, and show in the dainty visitor.

“She’s a young companion for you, friend,” said

Parson Ingrey one day, smiling gravely, as he peered into the lines of a faded sampler, framed and hung over the mantel-shelf.

"Rhoda Collis, her work, June 1849," he read out musingly. "And who is that, Hurst?"

The old man's lip quivered, and he raised his eyes, that had something of the eagle, but a blind eagle, about them, to the Parson's face.

"'Ee dostn't remember my darter, Parson? Her as Bill Collis married and took away tu years since? and the Lord took twelve months since?"

"Ah! ay! I remember. She left a child, didn't she?"

Mistress Hurst began to whimper, and Parson Ingrey, who had an innate dislike to tears, hoped to check them by leading her mind to the child who had been left behind when the mother went that way so many mothers travel, when life has just seemed to open out for them its sweetest and its best.

"Yes, ye see, sir, it were the Lord's will; but it came very hard, it did. And the good marriage that she made, sir—she had a kierpet in'er bedroom and all." Mistress Hurst had a fresh access of weeping; and then drying her tears suddenly, she continued,—“And the many as came to see her

when she were a corp! The beautiful corp she made when she were laid out, all straight and nice, ye see; and beautiful linen sheets, and all. O dear! it were the Lord's will, ye see, sir."

The Parson had turned to the old man.

"He knew best, Hurst, eh?"

"That's what I'm al'ays a-telling of him, sir, ye see. I'm sure I reads to him of a evening, and I tells him as how he must repent, and the consequences of sin, ye see—and all, ye see. But he doan't never say nothink, ye see. I never seen him,—there! I ain't a-going for to deceive you, sir,—I never seen him say's prayers, not I—he never say nothink to me. He says, I doan't know what he thinks; but, says I, sir, I doan't believe as heow a man can be a Christian and not dissolve on't!"

"But you pray, Hurst?" said Parson Ingrey, kindly.

"Ay, sir, ay! since many a year!"

CHAPTER II.

PARSON INGREY WALKS ABROAD.

THE thought that had crossed Parson Ingrey's brain, as he stood at Master Hurst's fireside, came back to him as he took his way through the wicket-gate and the hedge of onions gone to seed.

He was a studious, absent man, with iron-grey hair and a pair of keen dark eyes that had all idea of sharpness taken from them by the gentle tender honesty and good-will to all men that lay behind. His books kept his mind large and healthy in the narrow circle of that primitive village world. His life, the love of his little daughter, and the affection of his people, kept his heart large and warm too.

And yet he was far from being a model parish priest. He seldom or never visited his flock. If they sent for him, he closed his book forthwith, took up his hat and stick, and, first looking round the garden to see that Judith was there, and safe, he walked off, thinking all the way of the Cicero

or the Horace he had left, and arrived calm and kind and distracted at his destination.

A vacant "Ah!" was generally the first sign of consciousness. Then came the necessary explanation from the wife or sister or husband as to who the invalid was, where he or she had worked, how he or she had fallen ill, when Parson had last seen him or her, and so forth.

"Her as you see'd last month, Parson, if ye please, sir, when ye was kind enow to promise a drop of brandy."

"Ah!"—long and slow. "And you liked the brandy, my good friend?" laying his hand on the sick woman's shoulder.

"Please, Parson, beg your pardon, I'm sure, sir; but I think as heow it passed your mem'ry, sir."

"Ah! dear me—indeed. Well, send for it to-morrow—and, and—send the name too—I haven't got a good memory."

"She's been sewing, and sichlike for Mistress Bullen," continued the sister of the invalid, with as much minuteness and garrulity as if it did not all go through one ear (and the Parson's were big ones) and out of the other. "'And, oh!' says she, 'I has sich a pain right across here, it do seem to lay,' says she, 'just right across *here*,'" and the speaker

suiting the action to the word. "And, says I, 'It's rheumatiz, my dear,' says I. 'No,' says she, 'it ain't—it ain't a right sort of rheumatiz, nohow!'"

Here the invalid broke in, cheering up at the story of her woes.

"It ain't rheumatiz, I knows, because that 'as *swelling*—it's rheumatics, that's what it is."

"Seen the Doctor, eh?" which by the way was a query that made up the greater part of the Parson's comfort and conversation at such times.

"O yes, sir!" in a tone of gentle reproachful despair, for it was the sixth time of asking. "Doctor, he says, he hopes it won't be as heow it was tu months ago, he says, because that was *arful*, he says. He give her some medicine, he did, as set her up a bit. And, says he, 'You must nourish all you ken'—he says, 'you must take all you ken git, he says.'"

But hints fell short of their aim, and the most lively details were all in vain. Parson Ingrey was as deaf to his parishioners' long stories—as soon as the broad facts of health or ill-health, right or wrong, had been laid before him—as was Master Hurst to the "consekences of sin" as laid down to him by his wife. It was many weeks since the slouch hat had touched the low doorway of Hurst's

cottage, and it would be many weeks before it touched again. Never did man buy popularity cheaper than Parson Ingrey; and he *was* popular, with but one exception, all the village through.

If he came seldom, it was all the better, and the cheerier, to see him when he came. If he spoke little, and gazed abstractedly through long-winded explanations, making an irrelevant remark at their conclusion—a remark, when it *did* chance to be to the purpose, was all the more prized and precious. "*Parson, he says*"—why, that was conclusive, decisive, unanswerable. What Parson said must be true, right, infallible.

And now a thought we have spoken of is clinging to the mind of this absent Parson. It is not of Horace or Virgil or Cicero—certainly it is not of rheumatiz or rheumatics (he has sighed over that, and forgotten it in the sigh). It is not altogether of Master Hurst, and yet the sight of him awoke it. Judith, his little Judith—she went there every day, did she? Ah! ah!—well it might be a good thing, no doubt it was a good thing for them both. But Master Hurst was an old man now. Was it good for the child to be so constantly with an old person? to have no other companion than a man of seventy at six years old?

The Parson stood still. He looked north, he looked south, he looked east and west. Lastly, he looked at the church steeple. It was not suggestive. It did not help him. For a moment he wished he had a good memory. Then he made use of such faculties as he had—his legs—and turned back to Master Hurst's cottage.

"Ah!" he said, pausing and trying to recollect what he had called for—"Ah!—you know Trotter's End, Mrs. Hurst?"

"Ay, sir! Mistress Bullen's, sir," slicing off shreds of onions into a pan

That was just what he wanted to know. He had forgotten the name, and was ashamed to ask.

"Ah! just so. And can you tell me—has Mrs. Bullen any family?"

"Lor', sir! why yes to be sure, sir. Two fine young lads, sir. Amos, as sings in the choir, sir, and Jesse, the bigger 'un, as sits by 's mother o' Sunday in the big pew; but a' Christmas and sich times he mostly sit——"

But the onions flopping gingerly one by one into the pan was Mrs. Hurst's only answer. Parson Ingrey was on his way to Trotter's End.

It was fully half a mile from one extreme of the village to the other, and the Parson and Mistress

Bullen were the sentinels at either end. It was a long way for a man with a bad memory to keep his errand in safe custody within it all the time. But he stuck to it bravely, and rang the bell composedly, and asked unerringly if Mistress Bullen were at home.

The maid, who had never before been so close to so great a personage as the Parson, took to her heels (which by the way were blushingly exposed, as she floundered along, for the space of two half-crowns above the crushed and flapping shoe), and returning in a moment gasping and flustered, motioned the visitor to a little parlour, looking out into a flower-garden.

By this time all Haslington knew that the Parson was calling on Mistress Bullen. All Haslington stood at its doors talking and wondering. And when half an hour had passed, and the Parson had not returned, Haslington pricked its ears, and began to conjecture, as well as to wonder. The Parson had not been seen at Trotter's End within the memory of man.

In the meantime the great sun sloped slowly into the west. Over that flat Cambridgeshire country his rising and his fall have something that is peculiar to the place : nothing breaks upon his

great disk, until a weird pollard stands out black and gaunt upon the glow, and a sluggish stream lying alongside the pollard catches the gold light upon its lazy bosom—and villagers watch the fire-ball touch the horizon, descend, descend, till half is gone—till all but a golden rim is gone—till only the message shot up into the illumined heavens remains behind. It is like a sunset or a sunrise at sea in part: only that there is an unbroken calmness here, that white-crested, dancing, restless waves, and twinkling shimmering paths of light forbid on that ocean of which Jeremiah says that it hath sorrow, and so cannot rest.

There was a bridge leading to Mistress Bullen's farm, over just such a sluggish waveless stream as the sun loves to look into. The bridge, arched, and covered with ivy, that trailed from it and dipped down to the water here and there in great tangled wreaths, leads on to a cosy old-fashioned farm, ivy-covered like the bridge, but unlike the bridge, decked out with tumbled tea-roses, hanging their heads under the weight of their own beauty, and "travellers' joy," that had crept along the bridge within reach of the mistress's hands, who had caught it, and kept it, and nailed it up the sunny wall, where Jesse and Amos, or their clothes, had

their share in holding them: for there sure enough were snips of Amos's Sunday best fixing up a bud that was opening its deep apricot glories to the sun: like a girl at her first party, "coming out" when she ought to be going to bed.

At any rate the sun thought so, for just as the Parson and Mrs. Bullen stood looking at it, when the visit was over, day died, and gave not another twinkle of encouragement to the débutante.

Mistress Bullen had followed the Parson to the gate across the bridge. There was a swan sailing placidly along among the weeds from which the glints of sunlight were shifting and waning.

"Your little daughter would like to feed the swan, sir," said Mistress Bullen in a voice that betrayed the mother.

"Ah! so she would. Thank you. Then you'll send down the boy to see me to-morrow, Mrs. Bullen—about twelve, and"—the Parson hesitated—"just tell him to mention his name, and—and what he came for. I have not a very good memory, unfortunately."

And then they shook hands across the little gate, and Mistress Bullen went back slowly along the gravel walk, thinking.

CHAPTER III.

MISTRESS JUDITH IS NOT MOULDED.

“WELL, little man, and who are you?” was the Parson’s inquiry, as at twelve o’clock precisely a rap came at his study door, and Ruth ushered in a well-groomed good-looking boy, who stood cap in hand before his host.

Love, it is said, teaches deceit even to innocence. So does a bad memory. Mr. Ingrey, roused suddenly in the middle of Plato’s Republic, could not for the life of him recollect to what event he owed this unlooked-for intrusion. But he was shy as well as simple, and when Jesse Bullen, mistaking his “who” for “how,” rejoined “Quite well, thank you, sir,” and stood waiting for further orders or observations, the Parson shuffled meanly out of the dilemma, saying, “Sit down, sit down, my little man, I shall be with you in one moment.”

“Ruth!” said he, as soon as he had carefully closed the study door, “can you tell me who that is?”

“Master Bullen’s boy—him as is dead.”

“*Dead*—eh? dead?” in a tone of increased perplexity, but light breaking in through the chinks.

“Him as died five years since—that’s ’is boy.”

“Ah!” said the Parson, lifting up his eye-brows sagaciously; and, blowing his nose to look as if he had gone for a handkerchief, he returned to the study.

Haslington’s ears pricked themselves yet higher when an hour went by, and Mistress Bullen’s lad was still undoubtedly shut up with the Parson. But only the feminine ears were at liberty, and not all of *them*, at mid-day. And by evening a little of the marvel had spent itself among the women. And when day after day Jesse Bullen—always Jesse—walked with head erect from Trotter’s End to the Rectory, Haslington became used to the phenomenon. For very soon fact had put its finger on curiosity; it had become known that Parson was “larnin’ Jesse Bullen,” was “a-goin’ to make a scholard on him.” And after that, larnin’ and scholarship being unfamiliar things in Haslington, the subject was more or less dropped out of the village gossip. And master and pupil with unfailing regularity met and studied in the dark begrimed room

into which Ruth's broom and dust-pan were not suffered to enter.

So things went on for fully a month, when one morning, as he stood by his window deliberately dressing himself, the Parson's brain received a flash of memory. A little sun-bonnet and a childish voice recalled him to himself and his duties as a father.

Judith had hardly finished her breakfast; roll in hand she was going staidly down the garden, Bully, the house dog, just aroused from his slumbers, following her slowly, as he sleepily wagged his tail and yawned. The little hand went up to the latch of the gate once, twice, on tip-toe. All in vain, the latch was beyond her reach, and Bully stood by, looking all sorts of things, but doing nothing.

The sun-bonnet turned round again, and the blue eyes looked wistfully to the door.

"Ruth!" cried the child.

No one answered, and the cry was repeated.

"Ruth!"

And then a rough voice made reply—

"Bother 'ee, child, and Master Hurst too—'bide till I come, I tell 'ee."

"How long will you be?" asked the child.

"Till I's washed up 'e dishes and sarved Master Ingrey."

Upon which Master Ingrey, struck to the heart, wiped his razor, and went down in his dressing-gown and slippers, as was his wont, to the rescue.

So this was the way he had looked after his little girl, and found companions for her! Here she was, fully a month after his visit to Mistress Bullen, trotting away to Master Hurst, her one playmate, and staid and quiet as no little girl of six ought to be. And the Parson tried to remember what he had done with that playmate he felt sure he *had* found for her—and then he remembered, as he looked out into the road and saw Jesse Bullen coming towards him, what it was that had come between Judith and her intended mate. And he reproached himself an instant, and opened the gate for his little daughter; and then he forgot—for there stood Jesse, his hat off, and the open Delectus in his hand.

“What is it, boy?” said the Parson kindly laying his hand on Jesse’s head.

“I was not sure of this, sir, please,” said the boy.

“How? what the word means?”

“Oh, no, sir!” smiling. “I know the word; only I don’t know as how the accent falls.”

“Say *how*, not *as how*, lad;” and the Parson

took the Delectus from the hand of the boy, into whose face the colour had come suddenly.

"*Asinus*—an ass—is that the word?"

"Yes, sir, thank you, sir—I was not sure whether it was *Asinus*."

"Well, you're a good lad to come and ask, Jesse," said the Parson; "have you had your breakfast?"

"Not yet, sir."

"And how long have you been doing your lesson, eh?"

"About an hour, sir, I think."

"Good lad! you'll do well yet;" and the Parson was more pleased than he liked to show.

"But stop!" said he, as Jesse turned to go. And then he called for Judith, who was munching her roll at Master Hurst's knee, and making his corduroys her breakfast-table.

Very loth, she came slowly and shyly back, Bully following.

"Jesse," said the Parson, "have you ever played with a little girl?"

The boy blushed again, and said, "No, sir—we has no sister."

"'Sh, 'sh! *have*, not *has*, lad! Remember that. Will you try and play with this one sometimes?"

"O yes, sir,"—a little hesitatingly, as if the task were heavier than any in the Delectus.

"Judith, will you play with this boy here?"

But Mistress Judith's face had disappeared long ago between Bully's silky ears, and one by one, one by one, sobs came that shook the little crouched figure, and brought the Parson to her side.

He did not know quite how to comfort her, or what her trouble could be. He had not that "tender knack of tying baby shoes" that our great poetess speaks of. And, alas for thee, poor Mistress Judith! she who had had it was sleeping soundly beyond the garden, in the quiet garden of the dead.

"Was Ruth unkind, little one?" asked the Parson.

"No!—no!—no!" between the sobs.

"What are you crying for, Judith? don't be a foolish girl. Jesse Bullen will never play with you."

"Send him away! send him away!" cried the child through her sobs, kicking the little foot behind her in her passion of distress and temper. And Jesse, colouring for the third time that day, opened the gate and went up the road without looking back.

"Judith!" said the Parson when he had gone,

taking her by the hand—"come with me. What is this for, this noise and crying—eh?"

"O father! father!" and she clung about his knees—"I want, I *want* to go to Master Hurst! I *don't* want that boy! I *don't* want that boy to play with me! I want to go to my dear Master Hurst!"

"And what will you do when you get to Master Hurst?"

"Sit!" very plaintively, the sobs ceasing, and the thumb going into her mouth.

"Is that all?"

"See the bees."

"Is that all?"

"Look up the chimley."

"And what do you see there?"

"Black things."

The Parson sighed. There were more things in heaven and earth, he thought, than were dreamt of in his philosophy.

"Should you like to learn to read, Judith?" he asked presently, opening the gate at which his daughter, quite aware that she had won the day, stood waiting.

"When I'm big."

"How big?" with a sigh.

“As old as Master Hurst. *Please* let me go, father!” And as he could not resist a look that came into her eyes when she pleaded with him so—a look that had won away his heart years ago, when another and a sweeter woman than Ruth was brought to rule the house—a look that he had lost sight of till its reflected light shone back on him, as if from heaven, in his child—Parson Ingrey let her pass unhindered.

And so failed his first attempt at moulding Mistress Judith.

CHAPTER IV.

"THERE'S A BOY."

SO it was no wonder that with a good conscience the Parson continued to monopolize Jesse Bullen, nor that with a regularity matched only by that of her father and his pupil over their studies, Mistress Judith continued her visits to Master Hurst.

Had Ruth had more time at her disposal, the child would certainly have been dragged out by the wrist for walks, her hands shoved into those round fingerless gloves that are the torment of all children, and her sun-bonnet tied to choking, half a dozen times during the day. As it was, Ruth had the house to keep in order after her own fashion, the dinner to cook, the surplice to wash—a thousand other important items, over which she grumbled and toiled all day. And Mistress Judith, dressed and washed and turned into the garden after breakfast, was left to a glorious independence till mid-day, when she was called in to

have her dinner. The gloves were sewn stoutly to her sleeves—she could not part with them; but the little round fingers had no sooner been imprisoned than they extricated themselves, the sun-bonnet went back on her neck, the silk handkerchief that made her, oh! so hot, floated on Master Hurst's best gooseberry bush. It was a golden time, if she could but have known it. She would never have such freedom, mind or body, again.

All the villagers made acquaintance with her there, drawn towards her and her old companion as they kept each other company (and such good company they thought it) on the wooden bench from which Master Hurst could watch his bees. They had all a pride and an interest in her, from Mistress Gadd who had "see'd her *barn*, ye know," to the little girls in the first class of the Sunday school who had been allowed once in a way, one or two of the steady ones, to hold her hands when first Mistress Judith began to kick out and find her feet.

Lydia Goats, in a battered old brown hat, brought her dish and peeled her potatoes in Hurst's garden. Mistress Charter plaited straw as she leaned her elbows over the gate and gossiped. The great lilies grew, the poppies bloomed and

tumbled their petals over the row of peas, the patch of thyme fed the bees, and scented all the garden, and the bees themselves went booming up and down, poaching in the gardens by, coming home again, storing up their sweets, and whirling round and round their master and his little companion on the bench, under the vine and the jessamine.

And above all the sweet scents and sounds, like the clear rippling of water in a quiet place, rang the fresh childish voice of Mistress Judith. And when her little babble of questions or her falling and rising tones of reply ceased, Master Hurst's voice, like a tremulous minor, filled the pause. And so the hot summer days passed; and Mistress Judith was sent off later and taken home earlier; and the few trees in Haslington grew black and dense with foliage, and the corn ripened and was cut, and the air grew chilly; and the Parson and Jesse had a fire now to study by, and Jesse walked as fast as he could—for Jesse never ran—from Trotter's End to the Rectory and back, and changed the Delectus from hand to hand that he might blow on the other. And still he did not play with Mistress Judith, and still Mistress Judith went to Master Hurst's: though "sitting" and "looking at the bees" was forbidden by the

snow that lay upon the bench and on the hives, there was one amusement still left her, she could still look up the "chimley" and see "black things."

Oh, it was a place that chimney-corner in winter! Square and wide, and the great draught bellowing up the shaft, and the wood crackling, and the sparks flying up into the darkness—and the little stools set on either side so warm and yet so safe, where Judith could put her toes upon the log till the flame came within an inch of her red stockings, and then tuck up her feet and give them to Master Hurst to feel how hot they were; and where the fire-light danced upon the walls and lighted up the child's face while all the room was left in darkness, and only that time-wrinkled face that stooped over the warmth, for Master Hurst was very chilly, caught a little of the glow. And there they sat and talked together fitfully, hoping the rap would not come just yet, not for a little—hoping that the kettle at home would spill, and Ruth have to stay and clean it up—hoping all sorts of impossibilities every night, and never failing to be disappointed in all of them. For as certain as autumn after summer and winter after autumn, came Ruth trudge, trudging through the snow, whisking Judith as if she were a snow-drift, back to tea and after tea to bed.

One evening they had sat so for a little, and then Mistress Judith, with the fascination that the serpent has for his charmer, or the dog for the master who beats him, had run to the window and stood looking.

"There's a boy," she said meditatively, after a silence. Master Hurst did not hear.

"There's a boy"—much louder.

Master Hurst turned round and said,

"Eh, little missus?"

The news was repeated:—

"There's a boy!"

So Master Hurst tottered to the window and looked out.

"Who be it?" said he; "I think it be Mistress Bullen's lad."

"No, it *isn't*," said Judith emphatically, with a little indignation in her tone; for this "boy" evidently pleased her better than Jesse.

"Boy, boy!" she begins calling shrilly. And then she asked Master Hurst to open the door. And through the snow, which was not very deep, she trotted till she reached her father's gate, at which a boy with a satchel was waiting.

"Come in!" she said, catching him by the sleeve—"poor boy! come in and see my dear Master Hurst!"

And she dragged him along, while he came smiling and blushing a little, behind her.

As soon as he had come in she had nothing more to say to him, but retired to Master Hurst's knee, and stood shyly looking at her haul.

"Surely you be Mistress Bullen's young gentleman?" inquired Hurst.

"Yes, master. I be her second son."

"And what's your name, if I may be so bold?"

"Amos," said the boy.

"Arter his father, bless him!" interposed Mistress Hurst, who came in from the back room, wiping her hands and pulling down her sleeves.

"And you'll be nice company for the little missus here. Eh, my dear? will you play with the young gentleman?"

Mistress Judith sucked her thumb.

"Will you look in to-morrer night, my dear boy?" Mrs. Hurst went on kindly: "she's shy, is the little missus. Doan't be ashamed now, my dear, to talk to the nice dear boy! There now! To be *surz* he *du* favour the family! I could have told you anywhere, I could, to be Mistress Bullen's boy. If you'll tell your mamma, my dear, as heow I make so bold as ax you in to-morrer,

to meet the little missus, I'm sure we'll be proud to see you, my dear!"

Mistress Judith still sucked her thumb and looked up shyly under her eyelids at Amos Bullen's face. And it was a hopeful sign indeed that she did not lay her neck between Bully's ears and sob.

"Please, ma'am, I ain't sure if I can come to-morrow. I doan't go to school every day."

"And you're a-comin' from school, eh, my dear?"

"Yes, I was waiting agin Parson's gate for my brother Jesse."

"He's gitting a scholard I hear," said Mistress Hurst. "Ain't you going to git no larnin' from the Parson, my dear?"

"Please, ma'am, I have no learning—Jesse, he's to be a good scholar soon."

"And why won't you be a scholard, my dear?"

"Parson he didn't ask me," said Amos gently—"and I haven't time to go to school regular."

"Why not, my dear?"

"Mother wants me."

"And doan't mother like you to larn, my dear?"

"Mother says I'm not clever—she says I must just learn to be good." And Amos played with the buttons on his coat and looked down.

"And when you're big you'll look arter the farm, my dear?"

"Yes. I looks after it a little for mother now."

"And what'll brother be, my dear?" asked Mistress Hurst inquisitively.

"He says he'll be a gentleman."

"Boy—my dear lad," said Master Hurst, joining for the first time in the conversation, and speaking earnestly as he leaned forward, his dimmed eagle eyes looking into Amos' face—"them as is gentle in their ways, fears God, honours the king, minds their business—them is gen'lemen. And I pray you'll be o' *that* sort, my dear—o' *that* sort."

Mistress Judith had come round that knee of Master Hurst that was nearest her "boy."

She had a fellow-feeling for one who had got no "learning," and was to play with horses and cows all his life instead of books; one who would wear no gloves, eat his dinner anyhow, and have no silk handkerchief tied round his throat.

CHAPTER V.

MISTRESS JUDITH IS NOT SHAMED.

SAD though it be, 'the truth must out: at eight years old Mistress Judith still sucked her thumb.

And still she hob-nobbed old-fashionedly with Master Hurst, eat her breakfast on her way there in the morning, and hoped that Ruth would spill the kettle just before tea-time. On the evening before her ninth birthday, in fact, there were no signs of her becoming a rational and conventional little girl—in Ruth's opinion she was as "owdacious as iver."

But "audacious" as used by Ruth did not mean boisterous, or even daring. It is difficult to say what it meant, unless it expressed the conviction long ago driven home to the Parson, that Mistress Judith required moulding, and would not submit to the process.

She was gentle enough by nature, Heaven knew. Parson Ingrey's great difficulty was the extreme

sensitiveness of his daughter, who wept copiously if he hinted at being angry with her, and gave way to a perfect passion of tears if by any chance a sharp or harsh expression escaped him.

It was seldom enough, for he was a tender-hearted man, and hated tears, especially the tears of little Judith. And then her sins were so small, so few and far between! So, like the sluggish streams of Cambridgeshire, her little life flowed on, till unconsciously, on the eve of her ninth birthday, she herself cast in the first pebble that with others, from other hands, was to change a little the monotony of the course.

"Father!" said she, coming to his knee as he sat under the medlar tree in his garden, and shoving the great book uncereemoniously off his lap on to the grass, where it lay, all the corners turned in, and Bully wagging his tail and sniffing at it—"Father! to-morrow's my birthday—may I do jest what I like, father? eh, father?" nudging him out of his day-dream.

"Pick up my book, Judith—birthday, eh? Ah, so it is—who told you?"

"Mistress Hurst—Mistress Hurst and Mistress Gadd. And Mistress Gadd see'd me born, father, so she *must* know."

"*See'd* you, my dear! Judith, dear child!—is that the way you speak now? What ought you to say? come now! Mistress Gadd did what?"

The thumb to the rescue, and the great blue eyes clouded. After a pause, in which she ran three knots into the strings of her sun-bonnet,—
"Saw'd me barn," very slowly and hesitatingly.

The Parson writhed in his straw-chair. He did not speak for a moment: and Mistress Judith's heart told her the silence was ominous. In the meantime he walked slowly up and down the walk, his slouch hat a little pushed back, his head a little inclined forwards, and his hands behind him. Judith was knotting her bonnet strings, and Bully stood cocking his ears at the creaking of the now empty straw-chair.

"Judith!" said the Parson at length gravely—"come with me."

That grave voice was rare, though Mr. Ingrey never spoke lightly. Mistress Judith, dreading something and not knowing what, feeling guilty and not knowing why, followed slowly, thumb in mouth, and did not offer to slip her hand into her father's.

They went silently, a downcast procession, through the garden; the Parson in front, Judith

two yards behind him, Bully two yards behind Judith. It was not till they had reached the churchyard, and were crossing it, that a sudden panic seized Mistress Judith, and her limbs refused to carry her farther.

"Father!" she called tremulously; and he turned round.

"Well, what do you want?"

"Not to go to school, father! Oh, *please*, father, don't let me go to school, will you?" And her voice rose to an agony of entreaty, as she clasped her hands round his arm.

They were half-way across the churchyard; at the further end was a gate, and beyond the gate a school-house. It was lightly made of wood, with large latticed windows, and over the gable and the porch rained a profusion of honeysuckle and jessamine, and Virginian creeper still in its summer green.

The Parson had been making for this, but upon Judith's wail of entreaty he stood still, and taking her by the hand he led her to a grave a little less moss-grown and sunken than the rest, which lay in the sunlight by the church wall.

"You cannot read this, I suppose?" said the Parson, as they stood before the deeply-cut letters

that already showed signs of time and rough usage from the weather.

Judith made no answer.

“That is your mother’s grave,” said he. “I will not read it to you. Till you can read it for yourself you had best leave it alone. At nine years old she knew as much as I know now ; and at nine years old her daughter cannot read the words upon her grave-stone.” Here he turned away. “Judith, I give you to-day to choose three methods of making up for the time that you have lost. Listen to me ; here is your choice.”

Mistress Judith’s heart was in her mouth, and her breast heaved.

“You can do your lessons with me every morning while Jesse Bullen is here ; you can go to the village school ; or, you can have a governess at home. Tell me to-morrow morning which you have chosen. In the meantime you will come with me to the village school, where the village scholars will shame you into a desire to learn.”

Poor Mistress Judith ! Never in all her long life of eight years had she felt so downcast and crest-fallen. To be shamed by the village children—by all the little Gadds and Whitbys and Mulberrys—it was too hard, too humiliating. But underneath the shame

another feeling was coming to birth : fast as she ploughed along through the rank grass of the churchyard after her father was the feeling ripening. She was not being fairly treated—this was not just—she had not been taught as these village children had—no one had ever spoken seriously of learning to her before. Now, on a sudden, her ignorance was cast in her teeth, and she felt that she was not wholly to blame.

It did not take words or form, this first rebellion against the superior judgment of her father. It was a vague rankling, a restless protest against injustice rather than rebellion against him. The feeling was spontaneous, natural, and so true: no one had spoken to Mistress Judith of justice or injustice ; but out of her untrained little womanhood, out of her unguided humanity, burst out the little flame of indignation at wrong done.

Silently brooding, she followed her father, and they entered the school-house door.

There was a buzz of movement, and a scraping of forms, and a “ Hish ! silence ! slates down ! ” from Mr. Cocks, schoolmaster, as the Parson entered.

The Parson and Mr. Cocks had not met for some six weeks or so, and Mr. Cocks was proportionately warm in his greeting to the Parson.

"*Very* glad to see you, sir,—hope you 're well, sir,—and the young lady, sir!"

"Ah!" said the Parson absently, sitting down on a bench, putting on his glasses, which he only used on very rare occasions, and taking a slate out of one of the children's hands. He had forgotten to say "How d'ye do?"

"What class are you taking now, Mr. Cocks?" he asked, after an unbroken silence of some moments.

"Arithmetic at present, sir; but what you please, sir." And he took out his watch. "We have Bible class next, sir."

"Ah! very well! Bible class. Let me hear what they can do. Well, my little man, and what is your name?"

"Little Teddy Muncey," said a squeaky voice, and little Teddy Muncey's forelock, always pendant, went near to make acquaintance with the big boots he had been put into to come to school.

"Your gardener's boy," said Mr. Cocks, explaining.

"Oh—ah!—and you, my man—what's your name?"

A sharp fair-haired lad, taller than the rest, who was leaning over a desk writing, looked up, tugged his hair, and said laconically—

“ Mile-boy.”

“ Mile-boy ? ” inquired the Parson, suavely. “ *Mile-boy*, Mr. Cocks ? ” There had evidently been time for some new office to be made and official appointed since the Parson had last visited the school.

“ The boy as carries the miles,” said Mr. Cocks, again explaining—“ as brings the miles from Cambridge to ’ere.”

The truth flashed upon the Parson at length. “ The mails ! oh—ah ! the mail-boy.” He had lived so much more with books than with villagers, that he had forgotten the orthodox pronunciation of Haslington.

“ Well, ah !—Bible class, Mr. Cocks ? what do they do now ? ”

“ Collick, first Sunday in Advent—Lord’s Prayer without a mistake,—Creed, and—anything more, girls ? ” Mr. Cocks turned pompously to his scholars.

“ Please, sir, first commandment, sir.”

“ And this girl, sir, says the first commandment without a mistake, sir.”

“ In the vulgar tongue,” said the Parson absently, feeling he was quoting from some one or somewhere.

“ O yes, sir, in the vulgar tongue,” said Mr. Cocks, wholly innocent of any other ; and a little

startled by the idea that the Parson's rumoured erudition was about to be brought to bear upon him.

"Ah—give me a Bible," said the Parson; who had a secret horror of being confounded by the proverbial acuteness of children, and feeling he should be safest if he could confine himself to questions the answers to which were under his eye.

"The history of David," said the Parson.

"The 'istory of David!" called Mr. Cocks imperiously.

All the children stared open-mouthed and did not move.

"Ah! they have no Bibles I see :—well, children, and who—to begin with—was David?"

Dead silence. At length a little girl of eight stretched out a skinny arm in token that she was prepared to answer.

"Speak up then, child!" cried Mr. Cocks encouragingly.

"'Im as died last 'arvest."

The Parson looked up bewildered: Mistress Judith's solemn gravity gave way, and a smile bubbled over her pouting mouth. But all the children were grave as Solomon—as grave as Solomon would have been could he have heard—

to use a paradox—the silence which reigned when the question of who his father was, was being put to one hundred little dunces.

A taller boy explained.

“’Is mother sews, kivers cheers and sofers, and sich like. He were called David Pratt. It’s him she means.”

Parson Ingrey, a little staggered, went on explaining with exemplary forbearance. “David was a shepherd boy—he was a brave boy—God chose him for a great office—what was the office God chose him for?”

No one answered.

“Come, girls! come, boys!” said Mr. Cocks, “speak up, will you?”

“What office is held here in this country by the Queen?”

The “mile-boy,” whose wits were unnaturally sharpened by daily intercourse with that great seat of learning, Cambridge, was master of the occasion.

“Post-office!” said he joyfully.

Mr. Cocks coughed uneasily. “’Sh, ’sh, ’sh!” said he deprecatingly, shaking his head.

“If you please, sir,” he explained to the Parson, “it’s a confusion he has made, what with Queen’s heads on the letters, and all—he’s the mile-boy,

you see, sir." And Mr. Cocks stepped back satisfied to his vantage-ground at the end of the room, where he stood wielding a slate-pencil as a sceptre, and managing his lively subjects with no apparent difficulty.

This helped Parson Ingrey a little. By dint of driving, and questioning, and helping out, and telling, the children were brought to acknowledge and to grasp the fact that Mr. Cocks was a "ruler" in Haslington school. The inference was deduced that the Queen was "ruler" in England, and that David was "ruler" in Israel.

"And now," said the Parson, thinking he had made great way, and that Judith was yet to be "shamed,"—"I have told you how David was chosen as a shepherd boy, and anointed with oil, and sent back to his father, till such time as God should require him. Is this the usual way of making kings?"

No answer.

"Come speak up, children! Girls, speak up! Is kings made so now-a-days?"

They understood this form of interrogation better, but silence still prevailed.

Parson Ingrey racked his brain for a simple means of extorting a reply.

“Suppose,” said he, “that our Queen should die to-morrow—what would happen?”

Silence longer and profounder than ever. At length a growl in a further corner.

“Speak up, boy!” from Mr. Cocks.

“Soul-diers ’ud foight.”

The Parson rose from his seat, shut the Bible, and took Judith by the hand.

“Mr. Cocks,” said he, “come and speak to me at the Rectory this evening—and remind me what you came for, Mr. Cocks. Good morning.”

And Mr. Cocks felt that the presence of mind and wakefulness evinced by a parting salute from his superior was ominous indeed.

The Parson walked out of the school, through the playground, the churchyard, his own garden, in silence. But he kept hold of Mistress Judith’s hand—the hand too with the sucked thumb upon it that was, oh! such a comforter.

But Mistress Judith was not quite so comfortless now.

CHAPTER VI.

MISTRESS JUDITH HAS NO BIRTHDAY.

IT was a sorrowful birthday however, this ninth birthday—though Mistress Judith had not been utterly “shamed.”

The Parson, poor man, forgot about it altogether. He had forgotten it when he told his child—“Judith, I give you to-day to make your choice,” implying that to-morrow the new course of study was to begin, or at least that a holiday and doing “jest what she liked” was far removed from the grasp of Mistress Judith. Ruth, who had been the confidante of the little girl’s schemes,—nothing less innocent than tea with Master Hurst and Amos Bullen for a playmate,—looked upon them with dissatisfaction, and it was plain that *she* would not in any way enliven the Parson’s memory.

“See th’ be a good child,” said she roughly, twitching Mistress Judith’s clothes one by one off the floor and tossing them on to the chair, while the little girl, with pink feet dangling over the side, sat

on an erection she had made with the bolster and pillow, and slowly pushed her arms into the sleeves of her night-dress, which, owing to Ruth's fashion of tossing instead of folding, were by the way always turned outside in. "See th' be a good child—say th' prayers—moind what a' Parson says, and what I says—niver moind about birthdies and such loike—what 'll 'ee keer in tu years how yer passed yer birthdie?" Philosophy which silenced, but did not comfort, Mistress Judith, who sighed her little self to sleep without attempting further arguments, and dreamed that she could not remember father's name, and that father was very angry.

Next day came, and with it no birthday greeting from the Parson. Judith on tiptoe, with eyes rather downcast, went to give him his morning kiss while he breakfasted. He had forgotten all about the "course of study," all about the birthday. He was going off to Cambridge immediately, and left his daughter dolefully fishing with her forefinger in his tea-cup as he drove away.

But all day the heavy grievance—this sad neglect of the day on which she had hitherto been allowed to do "jest what she liked"—lay at the heart of Mistress Judith. Amos Bullen, whose mother's modesty prevented his coming constantly, as he should have

liked, to amuse Mistress Judith, looked over the hedge this day, having permission to intrude, if Parson allowed it and the young mistress was willing. But a woeful face looked through the privet, and a sad but resigned voice said gently—

“Amos, you can’t play with me to-day—it isn’t a birthday. I’m not to have a birthday at all.”

“Why not, please, Mistress Judith?”

“Father’s forgotten, and——” she stopped and hung her head.

“And what?” asked Amos kindly.

“And I’m too stupid—I mean I haven’t learnt my lessons, and——

“And what, Mistress Judith?”

By this time they were each, on either side the hedge, drawing close to the lower gate of the garden, where they met face to face.

“And”—a great gulp—“I’ve got to learn now—hard lessons—with, with”—her voice was shaking—“with a governess, or at the school, or—” here Mistress Judith fairly burst into a fit of sobbing, while she tried to say—“with father and Jesse Bullen.”

“Please don’t ’ee cry, little mistress,” said Amos, putting down his satchel. “Will you come, and I’ll tell you summut—out here?”

"Why can't you tell me here?" she asked, drying her eyes, while he opened the gate.

"I durstn't be coming in here—mother says not."

"*Jesse* comes!" indignantly.

"Ay! but please, Mistress Judith, Parson he's asked him, and *Jesse* he's going to be a scholar."

Mistress Judith was not quite satisfied. She considered her thumb, which was a little too dirty to suck just then. She had been making mud-puddings.

"Does scholars have birthdays?" asked she presently. (Providentially the Parson is on his way to Cambridge.)

"I doan't know whether they has birthdies, Mistress Judith; but I know as how they must go to school—leastways *Jesse*, he's going."

"Who says that?" with both eyes wide open, very incredulously.

"*Jesse*, he says it—Parson, he told him he has teachd him all he knows—he can't teach him more."

"Then I don't *believe* that!" indignantly.

"But it's quite true," said a clear voice behind her; and Mistress Judith, looking up, saw *Jesse Bullen* smiling at her, as he leapt from the study window.

"That you're a-going to school, may be," said

Amos, a little bluntly ; “ but I doan’t know as how about the Parson having learned you all he knows.”

“ You ’d best learn too,” said Jesse, turning away a little haughtily ; “ when I get back from school with prizes, I shan’t keer,”—he corrected himself instantly—“ I shan’t care to have my brother saying ‘ learn ’ when he should say ‘ teach.’ ”

Amos did not answer. But presently he asked—
“ Where are ’ee going, lad ? ”

“ To Wemby.”

“ Mother asked us to be home betimes,” said Amos ; “ you know this is the night father died, and she ’s lonesome.”

But Jesse was far up the road, whistling.

“ Amos ! ” said Judith presently, stretching out her arms, “ bend down, I ’ve got a secret ! ” He leant over the gate, which he had shut again when he remembered his promise to his mother of being home betimes ; and his russet head came close to the round brim of Mistress Judith’s white sun-bonnet, while the fat arms went round his bronzed neck.

“ There ! *isn’t* that a nice secret ? ” she asked, going down from her tiptoes and loosing her hold.

Amos coloured a little, either at the secret, or the embrace, or both.

“We won’t tell any one, Amos—and I’ll ask father—when it’s done being my birthday.”

It was nine o’clock that evening, and the Parson was sitting over his books by the light of his lamp, when he remembered Mistress Judith’s birthday. Her mother’s picture hung above his mantel-shelf—his eye fell upon it: he thought of her. From her his mind wandered to his little daughter. And then he remembered how he had forgotten!

He put away the books one by one; for he had method about one thing—his books. Then taking his lamp, he went softly upstairs.

The door was open. The tossed clothes lay in a heap on the chair by the window. The moonlight was streaming in in a white mist upon the floor.

There was a little sound. Could she be awake that he might tell her?

No: it was only a bat chirruping in the roof. With round arms thrown across the pillow, the hair lying half in disorder, half knotted up; the blue eyes closed, and the slight little figure disposed in the sweet abandonment of sleep—there she lay, caring nothing for the moonlight or the bats chirruping, nothing for the creaking of the old boards under heavy feet, nothing for the full light of the lamp

as it fell upon her; nothing now for the birthday that was over.

Ah! it was too late. He could not wake her; and if he had, what words could he have used?

The Parson felt it was well that she slept, as he turned away quietly, carrying the lamp. And yet he paused before he closed the door—was that a sound after all? Could she have awoke? And was there still a chance that he might tell her?

No: it was too late. The sun had set, and the moon rode high in heaven. It was quite done being Mistress Judith's birthday.

Poor little Mistress Judith, who had no mother to kiss her, and remember.

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CHAPTER VII.

EIGHT YEARS AFTER.

YEARS pass over many places and leave no trace. It was so with Haslington.

Ivy grew, birds built and reared their young in the same corners, the streams lagged by, the wind-mills fitfully went round, the sun rose and set between the pollards and the poplars, the church bells rang on Sundays, Parson Ingrey preached, the old folks dozed, the young folks cut their names upon the seats. And if Parson found a new text, if the rope broke in the old clerk's hand, if Mistress Bullen's cow with the crooked horn lowed, why it was all heard and known over the parish in the twinkling of an eye.

Just so it was when Mistress Judith sucked her thumb. Just so it is now, and she stands tall and fair like a garden lily; only a little bronzed, because the sun-bonnet is outgrown, and she is a sun-lover, always darting out of and into the garden.

Yes, there she stands against the wicket gate, and leans upon it—the gate that, when we saw her last, she stood on tiptoe but to reach.

Maids grow and flowers blow; and we would not have it otherwise.

“Well, I don’t know, ye see, Mistress Judith,” says Mistress Hurst, scraping the hem of her apron on the other side the gate; “you see, for the loikes o’ you, my dear, it ain’t the same as ’tis for sich as us, my dear, ye see.”

“But I went last year, Mrs. Hurst.”

“Well, yes, my dear, so ye did, to be sure; but you’re gittin’ on in years, my dear; and ye see it lastes so late, my dear; and there’s that dancin’ saloon up agin them housen as belongs to Mistress Bullen, and——”

“Yes; that’s just what I want to see!” broke in Mistress Judith incorrigibly.

“Well, my dear, ye see,” and Mistress Hurst put her hand over her eyes for the sun, and squinted up sideways at Judith, while her voice became confidential; “for sich as you, ye see, the Parson he’d say you *ant* to have a man along of you, and——”

“Well, and shan’t we have Master Hurst! Come, Mary, don’t make it out so hard and difficult.

Shan't we have Master Hurst, and amn't I going to wheel him up in the chair?"

Mistress Hurst laughed a pleased laugh, and could only begin feebly, "Ye see, my dear——"

"And if we want another man, why, there's Amos Bullen. He'll come. I'll see him at church to-morrow, and then I'll tell him. So I'll come over at five, Mary, remember."

And Mistress Hurst, shaking her head and saying, "Ye see, my dear——" was left uncere-
moniously by Mistress Judith, who, seeing a brown baby being carried in the distance, passed down the road like a soft breeze, and took it out of the mother's arms.

"O you nice little baby!" said she, caressing it. "Oh, but you aren't nice! It doesn't know its godmother, Mistress Gadd, does it? Please take it, won't you?" imploringly, as the brown face puckered up till it looked like a squeezed ball, and the squeeny half-open eyes grew smaller than ever.

And before Mistress Gadd, the younger, who had been six weeks a proud mother, had had time to reply, she found her offspring restored to her, and Mistress Judith was gone. But the offspring howled long after the departure of its godmother.

Mistress Judith had not to wait till Sunday to see Amos Bullen, and to claim his protection for Haslington feast.

As she went lightly up and down the garden, picking roses and dropping them into the basket that Bully carried between his teeth, a step on the road made her pause and listen. She looked up, by the way, at every step. Most people did in Haslington. But this time there was some interest looking out of her expressive face.

"Amos!" said she, when she was certain; and then she ran to the gate, Bully strewing the path behind her with roses, that were tilting one by one out of the basket, as he came bounding along in unnecessary haste and excitement after his mistress.

"Ah, I'm glad it's you, Amos," said she; and she opened the gate and beckoned him to come in. But he hesitated.

"Come in," she said, a little impatiently. "Surely the time is over for you to stand hanging outside because Mistress Bullen tells you not to be forward! She doesn't tell you that now, Amos, does she?" And she smiled.

A fine young giant, with a russet head, laid down a crooked stick he was holding, and came shyly into

the garden, where he drew a long breath and stood looking round without speaking.

"One would think you had not seen the garden before, Amos," said the girl, turning round to pick up the spilt roses. "But you have seen all I've done, haven't you, except the honeysuckle on the wash-house? And, oh! I've planted a climbing tea-rose on the wall beneath my window; come and see! There—that's the last rose Bully dropt—stupid Bully! Thank you, Amos—now come and see the rose."

"It's to look into my window," she said, as they went towards the house. "I want the smell of it to come in when I wake in the morning—only think, one of those great soft sweet things looking in the first thing in the morning! all the scent of it coming fanning in when Ruth opens the window, and the dew hanging on it—all heavy and sparkling."

They had reached the wall now. Judith put her hand against it.

"There! just feel how warm it is—just as if there were a fire behind it. Only think how the rose will grow on it—eh, Amos?"

The russet head was turned first up to the window that was Mistress Judith's—the same she tried to step out of as a little child, and then to a great crimson rose some yards off.

“Is that it, Mistress Judith?” he asked.

“*That!* why, Amos, that was there before I was born! I tell you I’ve just planted *my* rose: it’s a great *tea*-rose, not a red one.” She stooped down and parted the grass at the foot of the wall. “Wait a minute—no, that’s a weed! here it is!” And as she held the waves of grass open with her hands the russet head bent down, and with the help of a pair of large dreamy eyes, Amos was able to discern a little rose-shoot with a hanging, faded head.

“Do you think it’ll live, Mistress Judith?” he asked, sceptically.

“Live! why, of course! it’s only just put in! that’s why it hangs its head!”

She spoke eagerly at first, but her voice sank a little, as if she were disappointed, and she let the grass go back over the rose-shoot, and picked up her basket.

Amos, quick in everything that had to do with the feelings, and in nothing else, saw the change, and the expression on his own face altered a little. But he said nothing.

They walked away to the honeysuckle on the wash-house; and when he had looked at it, and said, “It’s very fine, Mistress Judith,” there seemed nothing more to say.

"I should give you a piece," said she, picking a sprig and sticking it into her dress, "but you don't care for flowers, Amos."

Amos felt it was a reproach, and he knew that it was deserved in part. But he should have liked a bit of that honeysuckle; and because he was pained, or because he wanted the flower, he said nothing. Some folks are fashioned so, and they are not always the least worthy of God's sons and daughters.

"But I was forgetting what I had called you in for—I mean"—she corrected herself as she felt the large eyes turned rather suddenly (for Amos) upon her—"I mean what I had in my mind to ask you when I heard your step." The big eyes turned again.

"Anything I can do for you, Mistress Judith," he said, reverently; and his tone had more cheer in it.

"Only to come with us to the feast on Friday, Amos; with Master Hurst, and his wife, and me. You know, he's too ill to walk now; but father let me take the chair on wheels that was lying in the stable, and he gets about beautifully in that. I took him up to see your mother yesterday; he calls her his 'blessed lady.' I think it is a very good name, Amos, don't you? Where were you yesterday when I went up to the farm?"

"Choosing cows at Paxton, Mistress Judith," said Amos.

"And does your mother trust you to do that?" she asked, smiling.

"Oh ay! she trusts me; but it's not for mother exactly now, if you please, Mistress Judith—it's all Jesse's now."

"Since when? *Jesse's*?" asked Judith, surprised.

"Since Sunday week, when he came nineteen; father left everything to mother till such time as Jesse came nineteen. Now it's all his, the house and farm, and stock, and everything."

"And what is yours, Amos?"

"The one field behind the church (there's two of 'em you know, Mistress Judith, but it's the right-hand side is mine, the other's Jesse's), and the one on the Paxton Road, opposite the Pembroke Arms, with a stile at the far corner."

"And is that all?" asked Judith, in a tone of greater surprise than she was conscious of.

Amos, as was his bad custom, coloured hotly, and said quietly,—*"Yes; that's all."* But his tell-tale voice told he was hurt or saddened, or touched in some weak part.

"And so you're managing it all for *Jesse*!" Judith went on, seating herself on the garden bench,

and arranging her roses in bunches, with a naturally exquisite appreciation of colour and form, and now and then holding her head on one side to look at them, while Amos stood beside her and said nothing.

“And so it’s all for Jesse!” she went on; “and when will Jesse come and see it, Amos? Surely he won’t leave you always to do the work for him, will he? Why, it’s your turn to go out and see the world, isn’t it? If I were you I’d tell him to come and mind his business a bit, and let you go travelling. To think of Jesse being so travelled! Why, there’s a letter now for father on the hall table; come and see if it isn’t Jesse’s writing. Father’s in his study, but he doesn’t count much on the post, except it’s a letter from Jesse. It’s foreign isn’t it, Amos? It’s from Paris! Do you write like that, eh? I’ve never seen you write, Amos. Come in here and let me see how you do it. Father’ll like to see the letter, since it’s from Jesse.”

She opened the door as she spoke, and putting her hand on her father’s head, with the other she lifted his face unceremoniously from his book, and turned his eyes to the letter, which she had put at a little distance from him.

“Guess, father!” said she, putting her smooth red lips to his rough forehead. “There’s something the

mail-boy has brought! Open it and see where your boy is now; and if there's any message for his mother."

Parson Ingrey's face sunned over with a pleased smile.

"Good lad!" said he, quietly. "Good lad! I forget where he was to be, Judith, eh?"

"Open it and see, you forgetful father!" she said, kissing him again, and then she rested her chin upon his iron-grey head, to read Jesse Bullen's letter.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHY JESSE CHANGED HIS MIND.

“**I** HOPE there’s nothing wrong with Jesse,” said Mistress Judith to Amos as they stood again outside the door, under the porch and the shade of the tumbled “travellers’ joy” that fell round them like a veil. Amos had a wholesome dread of Parson Ingrey and his study since the day when Judith’s “great secret” had ended in his being made her companion at lessons, and that, alas! had ended in his being given up as an incorrigible dunderhead who was not up to more than breeding cattle and sowing oats.

The Parson had not clothed his decision in like words. To Mistress Bullen he had broken the sad fact almost tenderly, and she had only showed any feeling on the subject by a pink spot on either cheek, and a few moments of silence, before she expressed her gratitude for what the Parson had already done for her elder son Jesse. That gratitude had since had food to grow upon indeed. From

the day that Jesse had appeared bareheaded in the study, and had been asked "Who are you, my little man?" the Parson had taught him, helped him, watched him with unceasing interest and affection.

When he felt that it was time that the boy should decide his own future, the Parson broached the subject with a quiet but deep anxiety. This clever clear-headed youth, with his keen interest in the classics, in mathematics, in history, in general information—what might he not do? what career might not be open to him?

Himself content with the calmest and quietest of country lives, he could foresee for the boy whose welfare he had taken so strongly to heart a life far otherwise ordered.

He would send him to a good school—after that a scholarship at King's would be a matter of ask and have. And then—a public life. A great preacher, an orator, a statesman—anything that should use and show forth the great talents with which God had gifted him.

Parson Ingrey was conservative—for instance he disapproved of new sermons,—but he had that large-mindedness that may exist in any party, and is apart from all. He approved of good measures from bad

governments, and he knew that good measures were being brought about now.

He was Broad Church in the sense of having a heart wide enough and eyes faithful enough to read and to receive good wheresoever it might be found.

And sitting in his corner, unbiassed by public opinion or by friends who were in power, he looked out keenly on the changes that were going on in the world beyond him. In many senses he was, as our Saviour said we should be, "*in* the world and yet not *of* it."

In his young days how stagnant life was in comparison to this! Why, till he had come to Haslington the services had been done or left undone by a galloping clergy. Mistress Bullen remembered as a child going with her father on Sundays to the rising ground, since called "Parson's Signal," where a flag was posted if there were a sufficient number in church to justify the equestrian minister's pausing at Haslington. And if Haslington had him, why Paxton and Wemby must go without.

Politics had been rife at times; and factions and parties, those sleepless incarnations of restlessness and sin, did not fail. Only God's Spirit seemed to have been driven away—only God's servants were asleep, and dreaming.

Now, if party spirit waxed high, zeal for the good and the noble was astir too. It *would* not sleep—it *would* mix itself with all men's matters, with all politics, with all questions great and small. And where Christ's Spirit is, men grow liberal. And so the age is liberal; and men start and take affright, and think it is an odious party-word that "Liberal." Perhaps it is a party-word now—words get twisted in the using. But for all that to be liberal is Christian, Christ-like; so for God's sake let us have a liberal age!

Parson Ingrey felt that the old times had been against him: that he had no energy to start up from the lethargy of the Church into which he had fallen, and that if he were young again he should lack the energy still. But Jesse, with his hot blood, and his quick keen insight, and his fair judgment, and his unquestionable talents—should not he astonish the world? Fresh young blood in him too, not run out and dried up by reason of the age of his family—though in their own way the Bullens were old enough too. There had been Bullens at Trotter's End, and Bullens churchwardens of Haslington, long before most of our ennobled families were risen out of the dust.

But then a fine healthy old race it was—not

having scorned to mix with always fresh country blood, not circumscribed by rank into ever-lessening circles, and ending with a pale sickly small-boned heiress, bound down by the weight of hereditary honours and lands, and sometimes by hereditary things less pleasant.

Instead of that—why look at Jesse and Amos. Amos especially, what a fine man he was! Even the Parson thought Amos a fine animal.

So Jesse had everything on his side, including Parson Ingrey's purse; for he kept saying to Mistress Bullen, who only half-entered into the scheme—"He'll want all his money by and by Mistress Bullen—see that you and Amos do the best with the farm." And so all the school expenses fell on the Parson.

It was just as Jesse was leaving school, a year before the Parson received the foreign letter, and when Jesse was eighteen, that the Parson received, poor man, another letter, telling him that all his hopes of the great public career were at an end—Jesse chose to be a soldier.

It was a respectful, dutiful letter. The lad bowed his judgment to the superior judgment of his patron and disparaged his own powers. But he had known as he wrote the letter that there was but one answer

likely to be returned, though some posts might pass before the letter was written,—“Do as you please, Jesse, lad. I am grieved that you lose heart about college, for you would have done something there. But it will be for the best, lad, no doubt; and you shall go abroad, as you say, and learn languages.”

And then, with some quiet earnest warnings and no reproaches, the letter finished by telling Jesse where he would find remittances, the amount to be limited only by Jesse himself.

After that the Parson had told Mistress Bullen, and after that he told Judith, for his heart was too heavy just at first to allow the subject to slip from his bad memory. And alas! the worst of memories can't make us forget some things—what we should remember we forget, and we cannot forget what we would not remember.

“Father,” said Judith, looking rather startled when he had told her—“it's a very sudden change of Jesse's, isn't it? He was here only the other day—what could make him change so suddenly?”

Parson Ingrey had been wondering too. Perhaps that had some share in his disappointment. But he trusted Jesse, and was satisfied that he could not have made up his mind when he was here a week ago.

Mistress Judith stood by her father's side. Presently she moved a little behind him—her face had flushed.

“Father!” Mistress Judith's conscience was making her speak; she was afraid she should not be candid if she did not tell her father all that she knew or could guess of the cause of Jesse's change of opinion. “Father!” she said, her breath coming a little quickly as if she were making a confession—just as Ruth made her do when she broke a tumbler long ago—“when Jesse was here we were talking about professions—Mistress Bullen was there, and Amos, and I; and Mistress Bullen said anything was better than a soldier, and I said I didn't think so. I said I liked soldiers. You know they had passed, father, through the village—marching, do you remember? The band played so beautifully, father, and the horses were so beautiful! And I looked round and saw a man ploughing, and I pointed to him and said, ‘Oh, who would plough if he could carry a sword, and have such music, and look like that!’”

“And what did Jesse say to that, daughter?” asked the Parson with a smile, the first smile he had worn that day. But Judith was behind him, and she didn't see it.

“He said nothing, father ; neither did Amos. But then afterwards Jesse said to me, as if he’d been thinking of it—‘Mistress Judith, do you think a scholar is better than a soldier?’ and I said—‘I don’t know for you, Jesse ; I know for myself I’d as lief have a mummy as a bookworm.’ And then,” she went on, “he said, ‘Your father’s a scholar, Mistress Judith.’ ‘Yes,’ said I, ‘and I would not have him otherwise. But no one can be like father, and I’d rather have a good soldier than a bad scholar any day.’”

“And do you think he made up his mind then, Judith?” asked the Parson, pushing his hand through his hair, with the same quiet twinkle—that Judith could not see—in his eyes.

“I don’t know, father—I think”—conscience was forcing it out again, and conscience seemed to make a great struggle, so that Mistress Judith’s cheek flamed—“I think he said quite low, under his breath, ‘Then I’ll be a soldier, Mistress Judith.’ But I can’t be certain, father; he mayn’t have said it after all.”

That was a year ago, when Mistress Judith was just sixteen. She is seventeen now, and Jesse has been a year away. And she is under the porch with Amos.

CHAPTER IX.

UNDER THE PORCH WITH AMOS.

AMOS liked that porch and the travellers' joy. He stood fingering it for a long time by Judith's side.

It was not till the day-breeze died, and the long white wreaths lay still in the warm evening air, that he remembered himself, and started, and took up his hat from the green bench on which Judith sat knitting, and then began to move his great person slowly away, saying—

“Good-night, if you please, Mistress Judith.”

“If *you* please, Amos,” she returned; “I am not tired of company, I can tell you. The days are very long sometimes, when father goes to Cambridge, or when I sit alone here in the porch, and he is reading or writing in his study. I am least lonesome here, I think; the flowers seem to keep me company—and as for the nightingale, he sings sometimes as if the very gates of heaven had opened to let him through, and he had only a little time to sing down here, and

so must sing bravely. I could not sleep for him last night ; I got up and closed the window at last. And, Amos"—she lifted her head and looked at him—"do you know I saw a light up at Trotter's End—three in the morning, Amos, and some one was sitting up? You must be very hard on Lydia and Jael if you make them spin or sweep at those hours—or was it your mother, do you think, Amos?"

Amos moved his foot uneasily on the gravel walk. He seemed as if he would not answer. Then suddenly he threw up his head, and the russet locks fell back, as he turned and made answer, looking at Judith with those clear blue eyes through which truth and purity look out.

"It was I that sat up, Mistress Judith."

"What for?" asked she astonished, still lifting her face and looking on him. The moon was rising over the edge of the horizon, and the sun had hardly yet faded out of the sky. The silver and the golden lights were just meeting and parting, and the earth lay still, the shifting shadows playing over her, and then ceasing—till one light, and one only, should be in the ascendant again.

"Since you ask me what for, Mistress Judith," said Amos, sitting down on the bench opposite her, for he never took upon himself to sit beside her yet—"since

you ask me what for, I will tell you. It's a long time since—at least in some ways it seems very long, and in others it don't—since you said it was a pity there should be such a difference between me and Jesse. I didn't see that exactly, Mistress Judith, do you mind? But you said, 'There are some ways in which there needn't be a difference, Amos?' Do you remember, Mistress Judith?"

Mistress Judith was aghast over her knitting at the fidelity with which her light words had been remembered. She did not answer.

"After that," said Amos, talking with a decision and a lack of shyness that for long had forsaken him in Judith's presence—"After that we talked a long while. I was foolish, Mistress Judith. I tried to persuade myself that learning had nothing to do with a man—nothing to do with his heart, and, and"—he hesitated—"nothing to do with the opinion that his neighbours would make of him. Do you mind on that, Mistress Judith?" And now he paused, and waited for an answer.

"Why yes, Amos; I think I mind." She was beginning to be more than astonished, almost frightened, by the resolution in Amos' face.

"Well," he went on, "you spoke to me, Mistress Judith, and made me think different. You showed

me God had given me power to be more than a stout labourer; that if I chose I could better myself, learn to read and write well, hold my head as high in the world as father did, if not as high as Jesse."

"No one could hold their head higher than your father, Amos," said Judith gravely, "for he was good."

"You said something like that then, Mistress Judith; it set me thinking, and I've never stopped since. I've turned it over in my mind a hundred times and more. Sometimes when I hear Jesse being praised so, and getting a gentleman, and seeing foreign parts, and such—I have an ill-feeling that I can't master. I wonder at God who made him to have all the good things—the farm and the stock, that pays so well, and mother's beauty coming out in him, and the quick clever ways, and the ways of making himself loved, and such like. It's not that I'm displeased to be here, Mistress Judith"—Amos looked down at his big foot and moved it again—"only I sometimes think, if I could have a turn at the wheel—why I'm strong, much stronger than Jesse in my body; and I've got on a bit with reading and writing and such,—and it was that I was going to tell you, Mistress Judith, if you please,

since you seemed to want to know what for I sit up of nights. I do it to learn to read, and to get up a bit of Latin. And some nights I write ; and I learn a bit of grammar. I think sometimes if the wheel turns, and I get my hand on it as well as Jesse—why it may be of use to me, and give me a hand on. And if not, why it makes me more fit to be in your company, Mistress Judith. That's why I began it—I can't tell you a lie. I began it because I thought I might stand higher with you, because I durstn't come into the garden and feel I was only a coarse stupid labourer—that's what Jesse told me I was, after his own fashion, last time but one that he was here. And though the ambition's rose—what there is of it since then—it's a very small part of me. I know I'm mostly content in the fields watching the reaping and the sowing, that I've no mind to be a scholar like Jesse—nor yet a soldier. But I can't stand low in your sight, Mistress Judith, and I'd as lief not stand low with Jesse. And I'm not too dull nor too good to have a thought of things higher than keeping the farm for him ; and"—Amos had covered his face with his hand, but Judith could hear his voice tremble—"and when 'I think my life's going, and how much may hang on my doing something for

myself and that—why then, God forgive me, Mistress Judith, I have evil thoughts against God and Jesse.”

“Amos,” said Judith, holding out her little hand to him, while her ball of worsted ran out into the moonlight and startled Bully from his dreams—“pray God to master the thoughts for you, and don’t have evil thoughts against me, whatever. Let us two be friends, and help each other on. We’ve known each other for a long while, Amos. I am very glad you’ve spoken out so free to me to-night. I’ve got no sister you see, Amos, and I’ve evil thoughts as well as you. I sometimes think I’d like to see the world too; but let us bide at our posts for a while, Amos, and then God will show us the way. May be father’ll be a Bishop, and go to London, and where’ll you be, Amos, eh? What’s that?” she said suddenly, and before Amos could stop her she had run down the path, and was at the garden gate.

“*Come back!* Mistress Judith,” said Amos under his breath. “*Come back!*” But he retreated under the shadow of the porch instead of following her.

She came back, for she did not like the face that met hers as she looked round the corner down the road. And report had strengthened her dislike.

“It’s Paxton Dick,” said she, looking rather frightened. “He said he’d spilt his basket by the

road-side. He has an ill face, Amos, that man—I mislike it greatly.”

“Ay, and an ill tongue,” said Amos, looking disturbed; “I’d as lief he hadn’t spilt his wares just in your pathway. And I think I’ll wish you good-night now, Mistress Judith, seeing it’s getting late.”

He looked round as he stepped away slowly. But it was not so much at Mistress Judith as with a vague hope that he might see the Parson, and get him to walk down a bit of the way with him.

“I’d do something to still that tongue,” said he as he opened the gate; “he’s as like as not to say evil things of her. God knows she needn’t fear, and I don’t. But there’s a saying, If you cast enough mud, some of it’ll stick. And he’s a foul hand at making mud and pitching it.”

Amos was too shy of Parson Ingrey to disturb him in his study. So he went on alone, and presently came upon the hawker.

He pretended to be busy with his wares, and not to see Amos, who however stood still before him, and forced him to look up.

“Good evening, sir!” said he with a leer, still pushing some newspapers under the eggs at the bottom of his basket.

“How came you to trip just now?” asked Amos; “you aren’t generally so apt to stumble, eh? and you came down very lightly since I didn’t hear you?”

“May be you heard better things!” he replied with a repulsive grin, as he shouldered his basket.

“Else I were not well off!” returned Amos sternly; and so took the road to Trotter’s End.

Judith could not keep awake till three; and she took care the moonlight should not awake her again. But at eleven o’clock she looked out of her lattice, and there was the light at Trotter’s End twinkling through the trees.

Paxton Dick, who kept unseasonable hours, saw the light too. It had been a matter of interest to him for a long time past.

CHAPTER X.

JESSE BULLEN'S LETTER.

JESSE BULLEN'S letter from Paris lay open on the Parson's table. Over it sat the Parson in a day-dream.

Say rather a night-dream; for it was past twelve o'clock, and the oil of his lamp began to show signs of being exhausted, and spurted and flickered spasmodically, throwing long shadows over the walls and drawing them back again, as if it were conscious of its little power over the realms of darkness, and were playing out its game before it gave its last sob and died.

The Parson was an early riser and a late sitter-up. He did what few can do with impunity, lengthened his days at both ends.

When first his wife had died, his vigils had been sad enough: sitting up in the silent house, looking out of his study window, to catch the glimmer of the comfortless cold stars; and seeing instead a nearer glimmer thrown athwart the garden—a glim-

mer from the window in the gable end, that told him (when a fitful wail did not) of the little motherless baby that strange hands were tending for him up there.

It was rather a weight to him then, this helpless little legacy. How should he bring her up, he who knew nothing of women and women's ways?

Now the vigils were not sad, they were very calm and peaceful: and wrapped in thought the hours went quickly by. The little legacy had come up somehow; for his life he could not tell how!

He had had masters for her, had he? Not he. Mr. Cocks had come from the village, had been given a word of warning and reproof at the ignorance of his scholars, had excused himself on the plea of their stupidity, and had agreed to undertake the education of Mistress Judith.

From that moment the Parson was happy. Mistress Judith was educated. Mr. Cocks was a proud man.

With boots polished, face soaped, his limp shirt-cuffs turned back and adjusted, and his moist hand filled with sugar-plums, day by day he crossed the churchyard, knocked at the door, scraped his throat as he sat waiting in the dining-room, and then proceeded to set Mistress Judith's sums.

Shyly he always administered his "goodies:" and at first they were eagerly accepted and eaten. But an unusually hot day made Mistress Judith change her mind; the goodies in their transfer across the churchyard had cemented themselves into a shiny lump, and the colour rushed hotly into her face when as usual they were offered to her.

She had a little struggle with herself for an instant, while the uninviting morsel stuck between her fingers.

"Don't you like them, please, Mistress Judith?" inquired Mr. Cocks, scraping his throat uneasily, as he sent his pencil swiftly across the slate with a screech, and then scraped his throat again at having done it.

"Please," said Mistress Judith at last, very humbly—"they're rather wetted to-day—please, I'd rather not." And after that they always came twisted up in paper.

But Mistress Judith, when once she had put her shoulder to the wheel, was an apt scholar. At fourteen Mr. Cocks declared her education to be finished. And finished it was as far as he was concerned. From henceforth she read learned books with her father (though she hated "bookworms"), opened her great eyes over their wonders, opened

her great child-like heart to their teachings, grew wise beyond her years in so far as book learning and thinking went, and remained a child still; ignorant of the wise ways of the wicked world, ignorant of conventionalities, judging right and wrong by God's Word first, by her own pure heart next, by her father's and Master Hurst's example last.

There were certain shelves in the bookcase with old dusty volumes in them that she had become as familiar with at seventeen as with the roses in the garden. She did not know which she loved best; the old musty books with their quaint sayings and startling revelations, or the great dewy roses that she dreamt about, and smiled over in her sleep—that she woke to see looking up at her out of the garden, calling to her with their speechful silence to come out “and be their sun.”

I daresay she read some evil things in those musty books some days. No one forbid her, no one laid a ban on this book or on that. But as roses grow on dung-heaps, and fair lilies upon graves, and are untainted, so was it with Mistress Judith and her child-like mind. Much that she read that would have been vile to some, had no meaning for her, much passed from her like a transient troubled dream. “There are bad things in

the world, that's certain," she would say to herself, shutting her book and getting on a chair to put it back. "And there are bad men too. But I don't know what the things are, and I don't want to know. And I'm not likely to come across bad folks, because there are so few of them left in the world."

Blessed Mistress Judith! who judged of the world by her own heart, by her father and Master Hurst.

So she had come up "somehow:" God and nature had taken her in hand.

And it was of her that the Parson sat thinking by his flickering lamp, though Jesse Bullen's letter lay open before him.

Partly of her and partly of the letter.

As she stood over him with her warm lips on his forehead, saying, "Open it and see, you forgetful father!" his eye had fallen on something in the letter which he did not care for her to read. So he had taken it from her, and she, only hoping "nothing was wrong with Jesse," had gone out with Amos under the porch.

Jesse Bullen's letter was to intimate that he was coming home. It was July now; he should be home by the middle of August. "Along with harvest," Jesse's father would have said, for all things and

times in Haslington dated from and to harvest. But Jesse had been nearly a year abroad; Jesse was going to be an officer; Jesse had quite given up Haslington ways and words.

There was something in the tone of one part of Jesse's letter that made the Parson think of Judith. Men, even absent men, prick up their mental ears and think, when some one stretches out a feeler ever so delicately, and it points towards their one treasure, their one ewe-lamb.

Jesse Bullen did not name Mistress Judith till the close of the letter, where he sent her his respects; yet the Parson felt that the thought of her had coloured this letter. And Jesse meant it to be so. Jesse was very cautious; it was one of his strong points. He might have been a Scotchman. But he had something more useful, and with him more prominent than caution: it was tact. He knew exactly how much to say without giving the Parson alarm or offence; exactly how much to suggest without compromising himself at all. It was a year since he had seen Mistress Judith; he was a mere schoolboy then. Now—an officer, at least on the eve of becoming an officer. The next examination would determine his career. About this very point of the examination, he was not quite at rest;

but of this naught transpired in his letter. As to Mistress Judith—well, he might, and he might not. It was just as well to put a paving-stone down; just one small one, in case when he returned home he might like to use it in laying others. That was all.

The Parson was not startled at his own thoughts, or the tone of the letter. He had thought it all over long ago. If Jesse Bullen should love Judith, and Judith should love Jesse Bullen—why they should marry. Judith was better born, no doubt; her mother was of very gentle birth, and had a little dower of some thousand pounds. But what was birth to Parson Ingrey? nothing except in so far as it made a gentleman. And the Parson put his hand upon Jesse's letter, and said it *was* the letter of a gentleman. And the Parson was right: in every sense it was the letter of a gentleman.

Still the lamp flickered and flamed, and still the Parson forgot to go to bed. Judith's chair, yet warm from her presence, stood empty beside him; her work-basket, with the little dainty gold thimble that had been her mother's, was on the table among the dingy books. Flowers were there, even in that sanctum. A great wild nosegay tumbled over a tall vase on a little table by the window. A specimen

glass he had brought her from Cambridge was holding up sister roses to the lamp-light. Pins were scattered here and there; little scissors lay agape on Virgil's back. And meshes of black thread were winding themselves round the Parson's feet as he crossed and uncrossed his legs unconsciously, and passed his fingers through his hair.

He noticed none of these things; yet somehow he was aware of them all. A woman's presence had grown up into his life; there were the marks of her all about him. Womanly arrangements, womanly untidinesses, womanliness in all its forms and phases was there.

How could he part with her? Well, he need not think about that yet. He took the roses between his large fingers gingerly, and smelt them. He did not care much for flowers; not very much; he thought they were unintelligible things, very.

But now he was always seeing them—always living amongst them. And Judith had put the roses there.

CHAPTER XI.

ANOTHER LETTER.

THAT same night, while the Parson dreamed in his arm-chair and Paxton Dick watched the light at Trotter's End, the russet head of Amos Bullen was bent over a letter that was not Jesse's.

But it would be Jesse's very soon.

Amos's great hand was moving steadily and carefully over the paper. His smooth brows were bent; his great elbows were squared. There was nothing to be seen of the large clear eyes for the shock of locks fallen forwards, and the intentness with which he pursued his task; blotting each page as it was finished with a resolute thump and smooth; never pausing till the fourth was ended, and he had signed a great "Amos Bullen," put a dash underneath it, and chosen a good clean envelope, on which he dabbed a stamp, and thumped it, before writing the address.

Such a neat, clean, manly letter it was when it was finished. Mr. Cocks would have been proud

if he could have turned out any scholar with such a fist as that ; but poor Mr. Cocks lost all his boy-pupils at eight years old. They could earn half-a-crown a week then, following the plough, or leading great horses by the mane, or riding them with their harness jingling along the dusty roads. And Amos had not been at school since many a day : he never was meant to be a scholar, and every one took that for granted, and gave him no help. None—till Mistress Judith was past sixteen, and Amos a year older : then it was that lights began to twinkle nightly at Trotter's End, and Amos took to helping himself.

He had not spoken of it to any one, not even to his mother. And Amos and his mother had most things in common. But something kept him from talking to her or any one of this. After all, with all his labours, he would be but where any lad of his age—a man now, indeed—should be.

But of this letter he had spoken to his mother : it affected his own life greatly : it might affect hers not a little. Knowing nothing of the contents of his brother's letter, he had made up his mind to write to him, and tell him that he felt that the time had come for him to be doing something for himself : that the five hundred pounds and the two

fields his father had left him were not enough to keep him independent: and moreover that he was thinking of travelling or improving himself for a time, of looking out for a farm of his own perhaps, —at any rate of taking some step to better himself.

Mistress Bullen, who had always been a little jealous of Fortune's favours to her elder son, dearly as she loved him, entered warmly into Amos's plan.

"I'll write to Jesse too, dear son," she said as she kissed her Benjamin that night, and sent him upstairs with a sigh and a blessing. It would be a very sore day for her that dawned to see that face passing out of the door—a sad Sunday when no Amos came to tell her the bell was ringing, and stood waiting with her big Prayer-Book that had been Master Bullen's at the door. And yet she wanted him to go.

"You see you'll have Jesse for a good bit, mother, if he comes home soon, as it's likely he will, especially if he knows I'm going to leave the old place. That time that he's here, before the examination comes off, I'll be seeing a little, and trying to set myself going somehow. And then, mother, I'll try and settle somewhere near—least-ways if I can," he added.

"I'll fare well enough, son,—never fear," said

Mistress Bullen, conveying more assurance to her boy than she felt she had to give away.

So they had parted at the bottom of the stair, and Amos wrote his letter.

He could not help thinking as he closed it of Jesse's surprise at the firm, neat address, and the still firmer letter inside (for the stamp had come a little in the way of the address, and the "Master Jesse Bullen" had to tail off across it). Amos was no letter-writer: he left that to his mother; and this was the first time he had taken his pen to write to his brother since they had parted a year before. He had the farm accounts by him, to be sure, ready to show to Jesse—as farmer-like and business-like accounts as might be wished by any one, though Amos was no "scholar." But Jesse had not seen these yet.

Mistress Bullen lay very late awake that night, and the stirring of the farm at early morning woke her out of her first sleep.

She got out of bed and stood by the window, which she opened. The smell of hay from the great ricks came sweet and fresh on the morning air. There was no breeze yet; night had hardly died, and day was not yet born. There was just the still pause of dawn.

Sleepy Jephtha Parcell, the ploughman, was leading out the great bay horse to water. The cock shook out his feathers for his first crow. Over the flat horizon the sun's pink light was rising and creeping; little by little the sky caught the glory: first, in the far grey distance, like a cloth of gold it fell over the sleeping land; then over the fields, the hedges, the weird pollards, the lazy streams. Lastly, it touched the Rectory gable where Mistress Judith's window was.

"Sweet heart!" said Mistress Bullen; "may God greet her as the sun does, and defend her from trouble yet awhile!"

And just then Amos Bullen strode out of the low doorway at the back (that was front door to Jephtha Parcell, the ploughman, who lived under the same roof), and lifted his hat as he stood looking out over the farm. His eyes went farther than the farm, where his mother's had gone before him.

But no "sweet heart" came to his lips—he only stood looking a moment at the window-pane all a-flame through the trees. Then Jephtha came lumbering up for orders about the dun mare; and Amos saw a gate open that should be closed; and the routine of another day had begun.

But it was only for a little while longer, thought

Amos. And whether the thought were sweet or bitter he could not tell. Only he must go—better himself somehow; do something to rise a bit in the world. Somehow or another, ambition—that good friend and that hard mistress—had found out quiet Amos Bullen at Trotter's End.

Meanwhile, with a glorious annunciation, the new sun was flooding Mistress Judith's room. She had drawn the curtain half across her window to keep out the moonlight, but the window was open, and as the winds began to stir in the ivy, and the breeze rose and sighed among the trees, it stirred the light curtain too, and sent it waving softly to and fro like a half-filled sail.

And the sun poured itself out at her feet as she lay there sleeping, her full sweet face framed by the white softness of the pillow; and her abundant hair lying above her like an aureole. And starlings gibbered and chattered on the window-sill, and the sunbeams crept and crept, and the great rosebuds were opening in the garden, waiting for Mistress Judith to come down.

But an hour, and two hours, and three hours passed before Bully and Mistress Judith ran down the stair together.

Even then breakfast was not ready ; Ruth would not or could not be punctual at any price. So Mistress Judith and Bully went over to say good-morning to Master Hurst.

He kept a special chair for her, with a patchwork cushion on the seat. And there she sat and read the Morning Hymn to him, while he listened with bent head, holding the knees that had grown so helpless, and oh ! so cold. And he looked at her with the sunlight on her hair, and then he looked at the great sun in heaven. And he wondered which were most like the "Sun of my soul" of which she told him in the hymn.

And then he held her hand a long, long while, while she turned, half-reluctant, to go home to breakfast. And at last he let her go, saying feebly,—

"May good God bless 'ee, my blessed lady—may He bless 'ee !"

"Ah, that's Mistress Bullen's name, Master Hurst !" said Judith smiling.

"Ay, ay—she be blessed too ; but you be the blessedest lady as I's seen i' *my* life—I dunno what I'd do if you was ta'en away from here."

"*I* taken away, Master Hurst ?" she said—"God

forbid I should be taken away ! What makes you think such things as that ?”

“ *I* be liker to be ta'en away, Mistress—that I be. But folks talks, Mistress—folks talks.”

“ Talk of what——” began Mistress Judith. But she checked herself, and said she would be back to see him before evening.

And as she went across the road, and looked up and down and saw no one, she said to herself that Amos was right when he said Paxton Dick had an “ill tongue.” For *he* must have set folks talking about her being “ta'en away,” and who by, except by Amos ?

And yet, she said, it was not so bad of Paxton Dick to say that after all. It was a foolish story enough, but it did not harm any one. She did not see that she could accuse him of an ill tongue. She would ask Amos some day what he meant by that ; what people did who were born with ill tongues. Should she tell him what people said about her being “ta'en away ?” On the whole she thought she would not, but she would see. When an opportunity came, perhaps she should not be able to keep from telling him what Paxton Dick had set about, and the simple folk

had been so silly as to credit. It would amuse Amos so.

Here Mistress Judith took a bound into the house, and kissed her father. She was not quite sure whether she were speaking the truth to herself. Would it amuse Amos—would it?

CHAPTER XII.

HASLINGTON FEAST.

WHEN Mistress Judith and Amos met again, it was the day of Haslington "Feast." By that time every one knew that Jesse Bullen was coming home.

But what was Jesse or any one else to-day? Why, here was the Feast! the Feast that only lasted two days; the Feast that came only once a year, on the day of the patron Saint.

Had not all the houses been newly whitewashed in honour of it? For days past the village had looked as if it had been put up to auction, tables and chairs turned out of doors, and busy housewives standing on chairs sweeping off the cobwebs and putting on the whitewash. And now the old oak chests and tables were shining like mirrors. The samplers, in their frames, were hung up anew on the snowy walls; from that little one which told of the death of the three weeks' baby that had died without a name, to that large one "In

the memory of" David, or Jonathan, or Abraham, the old grandfather, who had passed away last year, and left the great arm-chair empty in the corner.

Mr. Cocks had shut up school; no one thought of going to school at such a time as this. Two days of feast, two days of holiday, two days of wearing Sunday clothes.

They were all trooping and swarming out now; the chattering little girls all combed and soaped, with their best hats on. Whether it rained or was fine, at feast time all new clothes were bound to appear. The whistling, lumbering little boys, in their clean corduroys, some dull and some wide-awake, but all making for the merry-go-round. The trim matrons, with their shawls pinned across them, and their grandchildren or their children walking beside them. Young Mistress Gadd, and all the young wives and mothers, coming out cheerful and smiling, locking the door behind them, picking up the tails of their short dresses out of the dust with one hand, and shoving little basket perambulators, which held their staring round-eyed offspring, with the other.

Chatting together, exchanging nods and greetings, up they trooped to the end of the village nearest Trotter's End.

Meanwhile Mistress Judith sat in Master Hurst's garden, waiting for Mistress Hurst to don her best gown and tucker. *He* was dressed out as bravely as any beau: a pair of shepherd-plaid trousers, a black satin waistcoat flowered with red, and a coat of fine blue cloth that he had worn to be married in.

"Ah, ah!" he said, shaking his head, as he lifted his stiff leg with both hands and put it down gingerly; "there's more dress now-a-days than there were i' *my* time. On'y weared a smock, I did, all my time arter I married; nice clean smock I wore. And then, ye see, Missus, if the clothes wasn't so good, ye see, the smock he made 'em better—kivered 'em up like. Ah, I had a pinch for 't sometime, I had; twelve shilling a week, pay the rent and eight of a family."

"Sich a heavy family, my dear, ye see," said Mistress Hurst from upstairs, where she was hooking her dress, and ramming her nether garments into it, by the window.

"But you've got a fine blue coat, Master Hurst," said Judith; "father hasn't got a better."

"Didn't buy it, my blessed lady, nor yet didn't ask for it."

"We never ask for nothin', my dear, ye see," from

Mistress Hurst, still upstairs, and still struggling with the hooks, and talking thickly, with two pins in her mouth.

"I'm sure you didn't, Master Hurst ; I don't believe you ever asked for anything in your life except from God," said Judith.

"That's right, my dear, that's right!" from Mistress Hurst, upstairs.

"Ay, that's right, Missus ; never ast 'cept from God."

And Master Hurst went on shaking his head, holding his knees, looking at his boots, and lifting his leg by turns, while he mumbled feebly, "'cept from God ; never ast 'cept from God."

And then the garden gate clicked, and the little garden walk shook under the great approaching feet of Amos Bullen.

Afterwards, there was a time when Judith remembered the look that his face wore that day ; remembered how his eye had rested on her first, with an expression that had startled her, and made her think it was a hotter day than it had been before. Remembered how fair and open his eyes had been as he stood by Master Hurst's chair, with his head uncovered, while the old man blessed him ; remembered too, how the old man, blinking up out of his dim

eyes, that still had the eagle-look in them, had searched Amos's face with the tender piercing scrutiny that is the especial privilege of age, while he said thickly, for his speech now was very thick,—

“I hears as 'ee be going away; well, God He knows; I knows I'd like ye were going to bide here—I likes the looks o' you—you favours your father, you du, and he were a good man. I wish 'ee could bide while I lastes; but I've got my blessed lady here; she'll mind me, that she will; she'll take keer o' me.”

“He thinks a deal of Mistress Judith, that he du, sir,” said Mistress Hurst, who had now got to her bonnet strings. “He thinks a sight more of her 'an he do of me.”

Amos looked at Judith: she thought he looked a little sorrowful. She was not of that mind: she felt very merry and glad.

“*He* doesn't think anything of me, Master Hurst,” she said, mischievously pointing to Amos.

Master Hurst looked up almost wrathfully at Amos, and shook his head.

“If 'ee doant; why, then, it's time 'ee *du*, master; it's time you minded what she said! I've minded many a day what she said; since she were a little 'un, couldn't hardly talk; she restes her hand here

on my knee, and says she, 'If you're a good man, Master Hurst, God'll take 'ee to heaven,' says she."

"She were a wonderful wise audacious child, she were," said Mistress Hurst, who had at last come down, and was dropping the house-key into her deep pocket.

Then they went off to the Feast, Master Hurst in the chair, Amos wheeling him, Mistress Judith on one side, Mistress Hurst on the other.

And opposite the "Lamb's Head," at the end of the village, just where the road branched off to Trotter's End one way and to Paxton the other, was the Feast.

It was a sight to make rustic hearts glad. Three booths, all in a row, along the dusty road-side. In one cakes and sweetmeats, in one toys and trumpery, in one drapery, pins and needles, tapes and threads. Further on the merry-go-round, and still further on the dancing-booth.

"*That's* where I want to go, Amos!" said Judith. "Here, Master Hurst, we will pull you into the shade, and you can watch Tommy Bullen on the merry-go-round—because I'm going to the dancing-booth with Amos."

"They don't dance till night, Mistress Judith," said Amos.

“Oh, what a pity! Not till night? I should so have liked to see them dancing! I never saw a lot of people all dancing together—did you? What can we do then, Amos? Oh, I know! get something for Jesse. Here, here’s a gingerbread man—that’ll do for him; and here’s a woman, a gingerbread woman—that shall be for you, Amos! Here, take your woman! I’m going to keep the man for Jesse.”

Then she went and bought a pair of mittens for Master Hurst.

“Green, my lady, or white, my lady?” asked the frowsy bronzed woman at the stall.

“Well, green, I think,” said Judith, meditating. “I can knit myself, you know; only it takes me a long time. Master Hurst would catch cold before I had got them done. That is Master Hurst in the chair there; you can see the sort of size of hand he has got.” And then she pulled out a long knitted purse that Ruth had made her, with steel rings upon it, and took out a new sixpence to pay for the mittens.

After that she bought a hood for her little Gadd god-child, and a toy for this child, and a yard of flannel for another that was sickly.

Then Tommy Bullen, who was no relation of the farmer’s of Trotter’s End, except in so far as a sort of

clanship makes relations, but a great pet of Judith's, was brought up to choose what he liked.

There were a great many things on the "sweetie" stall that made his little mouth water, but mother had told him to be sure and choose "summut to put on," if Mistress Judith should be so kind as offer him a keepsake.

There was a pile of gorgeous handkerchiefs lying on the draper's booth; they had white grounds, like other handkerchiefs, but, unlike other handkerchiefs, they were emblazoned with goodly pictures; under each picture was a long inscription, and in every picture and in every inscription was a moral.

Little Tommy Bullen looked long and lovingly at them. Everything else was so dull at that stall—boots, corduroys, stockings, pattens.

"Well, Tommy," said Judith, "will you have one of these?"

"Please, 'am," said Tommy shyly, "is it summut to—to put on?"

"It's something to wear," said Judith, guessing what the case was. "Here, Amos, cut this off, will you, for little Tommy?"

And Amos came forward and bent over the stall beside Judith, while he made a slit with his big knife in the chosen handkerchief. And just then Paxton

Dick passed by, with his basket full of eggs and newspapers.

Paxton Dick always seemed to have a leer in his face when he looked up. Usually he went along with his head down, as tramps do. But now he looked up, and there was the leer, sure enough.

Amos could have stamped with vexation, that just as he stood close to Mistress Judith, cutting the handkerchief she held, that "ill-tongue" should have passed by.

Very soon the delights of the Feast were over for Judith. It was past seven o'clock, and the men who had come home from work were joining the women, and going out and in to the "Lamb's Head."

"It's time you were home, Mistress Judith," said Amos.

"Yes," said she, "I think it is; because perhaps father's got home from Cambridge. You'll walk back with us, Amos, won't you, and push the chair?"

Amos knew they should pass Paxton Dick again. But there was no choice; he could not refuse to push the chair.

When they had seen Master Hurst home, Amos crossed the road and opened the Rectory gate for Judith.

"Wait one minute," said she, as he began to say

good night; "wait till I see if father has come back."

He saw the house was unlighted, and he heard Judith's clear voice calling Ruth through the house. Presently she ran out again.

"Oh, Amos! it's so dark and wretched in the house—at least it's worse than dark, it's half light; father hasn't come home, and I can't find Ruth. Won't you take me back to see the dancing in the booth?"

Her voice pleaded as much as her words. She stood there in the gloaming, with her little hand upon the gate, looking up into his face, and waiting for his answer.

Amos's heart beat fast and high. How sweet it would be walking up there with her in the twilight alone—through the village, among the people—hearing them "talk," as rumour told him they were talking already—talking of what, of what?

The blood was pulsing through the great heated veins in Amos's forehead. He was hardly himself. "Come!" he said, quickly. And Mistress Judith came.

They were close to the outskirts of the little crowd, and the laughing and talking of men, who had had more beer than was good for them, grated on Judith's

ear. Amos stopped. He snatched Mistress Judith's hand suddenly and held it.

"Amos!" said she, in a tone of frightened surprise.

"I've done wrong, Mistress Judith," he said, recovering himself hastily, and dropping her hand. "The booth is no place for you to see. You must go home."

And just then, tramp, tramp, Paxton Dick passed by.

CHAPTER XIII.

HARVESTING.

THE aversion of Amos and the Haslington folk at large to this Paxton Dick needs some explanation.

In the first place—and it was no small offence in Haslington—Paxton Dick was a stranger. What right had he to settle in the place—he, who did not even belong to Paxton, but had been a stranger there too—he, who had settled there, then left it because the place was too hot to hold him, and had brought his wares, his great basket, and his ill tongue to Haslington?

The fact of his being a stranger told even more against him than the bad character he brought. Why, being a stranger was a bad character in itself!

But the tale that stuck to him, and that made men shun him, was a sin, often unpunishable, and so all the more frowned upon by public opinion,

which has after all its own code, and its own punishments.

Paxton Dick, with the malice that hugs itself in itself, and loves evil for the sake of finding it out and bringing it to light, had, by a small modicum of truth, a thousand sneaking ways and watchings, and the propitious concurrence of circumstances, been enabled to blast the prospects and foul the name of two separate people in Paxton.

Having accomplished that masterly feat, since when the leer had never left his shiny countenance, he had suddenly found himself unpopular. The men he had ruined were safely away—one in prison, the other self-banished from the place. But it seemed as if his rose must have its thorns. Women shunned him, fearing for their good name; men shunned him, for the sake of his own good name that was gone. So he awoke one morning to find Paxton too hot to hold him, as we have said, and tramped off hastily to Haslington.

He was the one man in the place with whom the Parson was not popular. The Parson indeed had a great dislike to the man, more founded on his appearance and sneaking expression than on any tales,—for the tales passed quickly enough from his mind, and he could hardly have told whether he

had heard any. And Paxton Dick returned the dislike twofold. He had nothing to hope from the Parson, whose sins and shortcomings, if he had any, were of a negative kind—sins of omission rather than commission. And Paxton Dick liked something positive, however small, to work upon.

He busied himself greatly in other folks' affairs, knew things before any one else did, and so, in the monotony of village life, where a little talk of one's neighbours or one's betters is pleasant and acceptable, gained a hearing outside many doors while he sold his eggs and papers, where he would not on any account be allowed to cross the threshold. He was clever,—there was no doubt of that, and travelled too; he often went to Cambridge, and his fine stories and his wise sayings carried conviction with them, when the women stood with their arms a-kimbo, saying "That's right, that's quite right!"—and the children peered into the basket at the eggs, that were always "newly laid," and had their fingers slapped for touching them, and then kissed to make them well again.

So Paxton Dick was not the last to hear that Gentleman Bullen was coming home. For "Farmer Bullen," as Amos was now called among the people, he had no affection. And then where would *he* be

now? Nowhere. The rising sun was Jesse, doubtless. And Paxton Dick (perhaps because he kept unseasonable hours) loved rising suns in general. For a long time past he had mapped his path, and now he waited with no little impatience for Gentleman Bullen's advent.

This was to be with harvest, and a month after Haslington Feast the first sickle was laid to the corn.

It was the second week in August. A fine long summer, with just rain enough and plenty of sun, had ripened the crops to a golden perfection.

Now a light autumn breeze had sprung up and went softly sighing through the waving fields; the oppression of July was over; the year was poised on the border-land between summer and autumn—she had given a hand to each, and stood coyly balancing herself, looking first one way, then another, from day to day and hour to hour.

It is a glorious time this August, this time of harvesting. Judith Ingrey opened her eyes of seventeen summers, and saw it all as for the first time,—beautiful, new, soul-satisfying,—as poets see it.

Had she lived before this time? It seemed to her that she had not, at least not in any much higher sense than her roses in the garden. Now life was throbbing in her, in a troubled, happy tumult. She

looked about her, and sighed from the mere *consciousness* of a living, breathing consciousness. How beautiful the world was!—how good was God!—how happy she was, who *lived* to see it all!

She was in an atmosphere of such peace and innocence and purity that she looked out from her dovecot and saw nothing else. And yet she was conscious of something more than peace; a new interest seemed to have come into the world, a new light seemed hovering over common things, and quickening them, transforming them. Judith did not question herself about these things; she only said, “I live,” and was happy. She said truly; had she said more it had not been true. She did not love, farther than that with her new “life” a new great love for all things and seasons and familiar faces had risen within her. But the haze—a little of the golden haze—that hung above her, though she did not stay to question it, came from something outside of herself: that *was* love.

Hot summer days, that reddened and swelled each ear of corn, had ripened the heart of Amos Bullen. He knew now, since he could not choose but know it, since he was ever battling with it, striving against it, falling under it, that the face of Mistress Judith had come into his soul, and that he loved her. With all the strength of a strong, pure manhood, and of silence,

he loved her. And she sunned herself in it,—that was all. And she was Mistress Judith to him still. Beautiful—far above him, far out of his vulgar reach. “Farmer Bullen!” he said the words bitterly; if he were “Gentleman Bullen,” like Jesse, he might perhaps aspire—might dare to hope. But God had given the talents to one, and the love to the other. Amos thought God’s ways were past finding out.

In these days he was very shy of the Rectory and the Rectory gate. From afar off at early morning he loved to see the sun saluting the trees that grew about her home, that sheltered the flowers her hands had planted. For the window itself, it was not aflame now as in early summer. The sun had gone a great way round, and harvest was come.

Yes, harvest was come—a busy, golden, beautiful time. Nowhere more beautiful than in Haslington and its sister villages, where nature has not been prodigal of her gifts, where there are no hills and few trees, and where the colouring of sun and sky, and changing seasons, and the busy scenes of country life have an unbroken theatre to play upon.

On a Saturday morning Mistress Judith, who had been sitting on the window-seat in her father’s study, flung down her book hastily, and pulled down her straw hat from the peg in the hall. She had been

dreaming a long while over the open Plato on her knee.

“Well, Judith, what do you think of it?” asked the Parson.

“I like it, father; at least I liked it last night, when you read it to me.—Ah, that was fine, father, when he died!”

She had thought it very fine. Dewy enough her eyes were, and her red lips quivered, as side by side in the lamplight they had read the “Phædo” together. In her eagerness she had followed each word, repeating it aloud after her father, till at last the tone fell, and the words trembled, and at length she ceased. And Parson Ingrey’s voice went on alone—

“He was beginning to grow cold about the groin, when he uncovered his face, for he had covered himself up, and said (they were his last words)—he said——”

But “Oh, hush, father—please stop!” broke in Mistress Judith, and the golden head had gone down upon the table suddenly, and she did not look up for some time.

When she recovered herself, woman-wise she looked up and said: “What did he say, father?”

“Who, my dear?” asked the Parson, who had forgotten about Socrates, and had gone on to the Symposium.

“Socrates, father—what did he say?” very tearfully still.

“‘Crito, I owe a cock to Asclepius’—that is what he said,” replied the Parson drily, with the twinkle of a smile in his eyes, at which Mistress Judith had first said “*Oh!*” in a tone of great disappointment, and then had laughed, and gone to bed.

Now she was trying to read a Dialogue by daylight, but it was *such* daylight, how could she? So she threw down the Plato and took the straw hat.

She went to Master Hurst’s, but the doors were closed.

“How stupid!” she said; “this is the first glean-ing day!—of course every one is out. I’ll go and see them glean.”

So she called out “good morning” to Master Hurst, who was locked up upstairs till his “missus” came home. And then she made for the field.

It was not ten o’clock yet. The haze of morning had not passed away, and the dew was still trembling on everything along her path. The roads were dusty enough, but through the little village street, and out beyond the last house, the traces of the harvest lay thickly strewn over the ground. In golden shining patches lay the heavy ears of barley that had fallen from the great laden waggons as they passed. From

the trees, in a shimmering waving fringe, the long stems that had been caught upward hung all along the road ; they made a sort of fairy filmy arch for Mistress Judith as she went blithely by.

The sky was clear and blue and cloudless and far off ; the air was full of thistle-down, that fluttered and rose and fell lightly, and of darting dragon-flies that wheeled and boomed and settled—and then wheeled and boomed again. Pink convolvulus had swathed all the hedges up and down ; briony, with its berries ripening into red, and its beautiful leaves hanging, tumbled across the privet here and there.

Far off was the sound of the sweeping sickle, of the voices of children, of the creaking of heavy wains.

On one side a field of beans, brown, cut and sheaved already ; on the other, ruddiest, ripest barley, half reaped. Further on, a field that had been “carried” the evening before.

In this last field all Haslington was gleaning. Men there were none, for their strong arms were needed all the day, and a long day it is in harvest. But women of all ages, with children of all ages, had come like Ruth to the field of Boaz.

Fat babies lay cooing on their backs here and there, little girls with officious zeal rushing suddenly upon them, setting them upright, pulling their pinafores

down and their backs up, making them open their eyes wide before they relapsed into the old position, which was so much more comfortable and free.

When Mistress Judith came into the field there was a chorus of kindly greetings and of curtseys.

“I am not going to glean,” said she, “but I might pick up some of the babies.”

But as soon as she saw how very happy the babies were, kicking out freely on their backs and studying the heavens, she sat down on the stubble instead, and talked to the women as they passed her.

CHAPTER XIV.

GLEANNING.

“GOOD gleanin’? oh, ay—it be good enow, thank you, mem—fine and full i’ the ear, and heavy too. I could git a good lapful an it weren’t for the baby. My first he died with puttin’ of him out in ’arvest two year ago this ’arvest that was, and my husband says I shouldn’t put out this baby not no more, so I’s forced like to take him i’ the field along of me. He looks well? yes, he du, and thenk you, mem. He were very sickly last ’arvest, that he were. Never looked up, he didn’t, not ’cept his father come in over the door. Then he were fierce as fierce, weren’t he, mother?”

“Ay, that he wur, as fierce as fierce,” said the grandmother, bending her old back over the nearly clean field, and picking up a single ear once in twenty yards.

“He’ll be helping you to glean soon, Mistress Sagger,” said Judith; “by this time four or five years.”

"Ah, that he will, mem; but I doan't know as how the gleanin' 'll be then. Folks say as them 'chines is a-comin' in, and cleans up a place terrible close, they du. There won't be much left for poor folks, not then."

"I hope they *won't* come here then," said Judith warmly. She was sitting with her hat pushed back from her face, and the round straw brim framed in the oval like a halo; her hands clasped round her knees, and Bully lying panting beside her. She was a little sunburnt in those days, and yet she looked a lily beside the bronzed women who were round her.

"That 'll be as how Master Bullen likes, I take it," said another speaker.

"If he favours 'is father, he 'll be good to poor folks," said a third.

"Farmer Bullen, it 's him as favours the old gen'leman," said a fourth.

As they passed out of Judith's hearing, they talked with still greater freedom on the same topic. Here was Saturday: on Monday Gentleman Bullen was coming home. No wonder they were all agog with excitement and speculation.

"There bean't no doubt but he 's a-comin' Monday, be there?"

"Nay, not likely. Sukey, she been up a washin' for Mistress Bullen this two dies, and she tell me as how

they been a-washin' of the winder curtins as hasn't been up since the old gen'leman died."

"My man," said Mistress Muncey, the blacksmith's wife, speaking confidentially, and with the importance that became her as the bearer of so valuable an addition to the facts of the case,—“My man he have been up—Master Amos he have sent for him, and he tell me as he have grinden all the knives, and oilen the boiler and sich, and putten a new nob on the poker. Now if that bean't a sign sure and sartin as the young man's a-comin' Monday, my name bean't Lydia Muncey."

"Well, and it *ain't* like they 'd make sich turn out and that an the young gen'leman *weren't* a-comin' home Monday," echoed a neighbour.

"What's more," said Mistress Gadd, "I see'd Mistress Bullen a-airin' of summut i' the gardin. And thinks I to myself, if them bean't him sheets, I'm greatly mistook. Ou ay, I knows their ways and sich. I see'd 'em barn, both on 'em, bless their hearts! and fine childer they was both on 'em."

"Master Amos he be a fine man surely," said one of the women. "And kind-hearted like his father. We'll spare him ill when he takes to go away. I dunno, but I doesn't seem to take so kindly to t'other 'un on 'em."

"He do seem consekial," said another ; "that comes o' going to strange parts, and sich."

"Well, you see they *gits* consekial when they gits to any bigness ; my boy, he doan't keer now for what me nor his father says, not he."

"Come, girls, come now !" cried Mistress Jacklin, the wag of the village, bustling up with a bundle in her lap and another balanced on her head. It was the fashion to laugh at what Mistress Jacklin said ; so they all laughed before she had said anything more witty than "Come, girls, come."

"Hisht, Becky !" said one or two, "there be Master Amos come i' the field."

And so he had. He lifted his hat with one hand as he strode through the stubble, and pushed back his hair with the other ; passing Judith without seeing her, he joined the knot of women who were fastening up their bundles in great cloths.

There he stood with his back to Judith and talked : talked first to one and then to another ; asked them how they had fared, looked at the great bundles, and smiled. And as they passed out of the gate (for the great church-bell was ringing to tell them gleaning-time was over, and after that not an ear was gathered), Judith could hear them talking of Amos still.

“The beans? yes, he says as how he’ll see them kerried this afternoon, he will, so ’s we can git in Monday early. Look ’e here then, Hannah child, I’ll help ’e kerry yer bundle. Rest it ’ere agin them black postes, and I’ll take it up fair. It’s very hattering for the childer is gleanin’ time, bless their hearts. Up so ’arly of a mornin’ and doesn’t git a bed till late. I bean’t sorry to-morrow be Sabbath, be you, neighbour?”

“That I bean’t. The shirts they du be dirty of a Saturday night; cleans ’em with a brush, I du; and Sunday, ye see, it du come in ’andy—cooks yer dinner, gives it the men noice and hot—sends the childer to church, and then gits dressed comfortable like afore evenin’ church—and goes reg’lar—say yer prayers, ’ears the sarmint, and comes away. There they be, a-takin’ the cart o’ beer in the bean-field; why, Joe he’ll be glad o’ that—he take koind to’s beer, he du. There he be, there he be! and oh my, the shirt as’ll be on him! oh my!—so good afternoon, Becky, and here, Hannah, take yer bundle, will ye?”

And so the long procession of women, each with her burden poised upon her head—one arm akimbo and the other held out to some little child, passed out on to the road, broke up into knots of twos or threes, and then dispersed altogether, as each one drew her

house-key from her pocket, and disappeared, bundle and all, under her low doorway.

Amos Bullen, with his head bent, followed them slowly across the field.

Mistress Judith looked up from her knitting.

“Good morning, Amos.”

He started, and took off his hat as he returned her greeting.

“I suppose you won’t be many days longer at the harvesting, Amos? you’ll go soon after Jesse comes, won’t you?”

“Jesse has no mind I should,” he answered, smiling, but speaking a little warmly all the same. “He thinks I might as well bide here and mind *his* business.”

“Oh, Amos, he can’t be so selfish surely! Have you had a letter from him?”

“Mother has, Mistress Judith, and he sent a message to me that he hoped I wouldn’t give up the farm, as he couldn’t mind it himself. He’s a gentleman now, you know, Mistress Judith.”

“Amos, don’t speak unkindly like that—it isn’t like you to do it.” And Mistress Judith, half ashamed of reproving him, kept her head bent over her knitting.

There was silence for a moment, except for the boom of the great dragon-flies, with their blue bodies

and silver wings, that skimmed past them, and the creaking of the wains in the bean-field hard by. Then Amos, always standing up before Judith and kicking the warm stubble with his foot, said gently—

“I have no mind to speak hardly of Jesse, Mistress Judith. He’s my brother, and he’s never done me a bad turn yet. Only I was sore at his message, Mistress Judith, I don’t deny. If you had written the letter I did, and felt as I did, and put things as plain as I did, you’d be a little sore too. Not even an answer—only a message, taking it so lightly. It read to me like this, Mistress Judith: ‘I am Jesse, and my affairs go best while I improve yourself and while you mind the farm. After all, you are only Amos.’ That’s how it read, Mistress Judith; that’s how it read to me.”

That was just how the letter *had* read, and how the letter had been written. Amos improving himself? travelling? Why he never could improve! Had not the Parson tried him, and his mother tried him, and Jesse tried him, and had it not always failed? Jesse turned the neat letter over in his nice ringed hand—he had bought a ring in Paris—and wondered how Amos had got to write like that: in spite of being incapable of improvement, how had he got to write like that?

He felt a little annoyed that Amos should have got such foolish notions in his head. Surely it *was* a little presumptuous on his part to think of asking him, Jesse, to come home and mind the farm, when all Jesse's future depended on his preparing for and passing his examination. When he had passed, and had time to think of it, he might put a steady head-man under his mother at Trotter's End, and then—why, he supposed Amos could go where he liked. In the meantime Amos must stay. That was imperative. He should have a salary if he chose for doing the work, or a percentage on the proceeds of the farm. But stay he must till after the examination. Jesse was getting nervous about that examination; he felt he could not be worried about other things just now.

Mistress Bullen was not easy about her son's letter. She foresaw a cloud not bigger than a man's hand, but still a cloud, rising in the east. And Monday was to have been so joyful. The fatted calf was to be killed, and there was no prodigal in the matter. Mistress Bullen thought Jesse was coming back to her after a long absence abroad, just as he had left her. She wished now that Amos would be content to stay at home and have no discussion with Jesse. And yet now and then, when it had come across her suddenly, she thought it would be best if he were to go.

She looked out on this Saturday morning from her garden and saw the train of gleaners winding out of the field and down the road. And then she saw Amos talking to Mistress Judith near the gate.

She had a pure woman's deep love and admiration for a pure woman. She was hardly less in love with Mistress Judith than was her son.

And that was just why she did not feel at ease when she saw them there together. How beautiful that face must be as she looked up at him! how beautiful the little round soft hands that plied the twinkling needles! And as for Mistress Judith's voice—Mistress Bullen knew it was the sweetest music her ears had ever heard.

There was the sun burnishing her great twists of hair, and tinting her cheeks with beautiful colour. And there was the large straw hat throwing its shadows fitfully, and the great eyes looking up blue and innocent and wise from underneath it.

Mistress Bullen wished Amos would come home, while she went about with her scissors clipping off the dead roses from her standards. Every now and then she sighed a little as she looked up and saw them still there—still together.

And innocent Mistress Judith was talking of all manner of things but love,—of the people, of the

gleaning, of church, of Jesse. And Amos, grown very silent, stood beside her leaning upon the gate.

It was not till she said, "I must go now ; father will be waiting for his dinner," that he awoke out of his silence and spoke.

"May I come along with you, Mistress Judith?"

"Yes ; why not ? and I'll show you the rose that has come out this morning."

"It's the last time, may be," he said, as they walked down the road, and he drew a bunch of grain from the tree it hung upon, and then threw it on the ground under Judith's feet.

CHAPTER XV.

CHURCH.

MISTRESS JUDITH woke next morning to find the sun flooding her room, and to know by the silence that it was Sunday. No bell for the gleaners rang out in business-like fashion at six o'clock from the old church-steeple; no carts went to and fro; there was no sound of men's voices, and of great whips cracking, up and down the roads and in the fields.

The yellow half-reaped fields lay basking unmolested in the sun. And the morning haze had come again, and was mellowing the flat gilded landscape into a rich tuncful harmony.

It is an old simile, the "smile" of the sun, or of the earth. Yet what else describes the blissful radiance of morning sun upon a fertile country, especially if the season be harvest, and what describes the look the earth wears better than to say she smiles?

And over flat Cambridgeshire the smile can be so

broad. The far blue distance smiles, and the streams smile—above all, the ruddy corn-fields smile and smile; up to the garden, where the roses and the dahlias smile, and the window-panes that flash back the glory smile too.

Mistress Judith loved Sunday; it was a beautiful quiet day to her, yet with more stir in it than other days brought with them.

First there was breakfast; then Sunday-school. After Sunday-school she drove her flock across the garden and the churchyard into church. The great bell went clanging and booming; the quiet, decent, cheerful folk came crowding and gathering; the old-fashioned pews filled; the bells stopped; the barrel-organ began to play. Mr. Cocks wound the barrel-organ with great proficiency.

It was time for the Parson to be at his post. But no Parson came.

“He has forgotten,” said Judith to herself, and slipped out of her great square box noiselessly to go and tell him.

Yes, he had forgotten. He was budding a rose in the garden. He had learnt from Judith how to bud roses, and he was trying a little experiment in that line for the first time.

“The bell’s stopped, father,” said Judith, putting

his surplice on, out in the garden, just as he stood, and stuffing the sermon-case into his hand.

"It's empty, it's empty," said the Parson, wiping his knife deliberately with his handkerchief, and still brooding over the rose-bush.

"Can I find it, father? The people are all waiting."

"They haven't begun, eh? have they?" he asked concernedly.

"Yes, father, I've read as far as the first lesson, and now they think you had better go on," said Judith, laughing, as she dragged him towards the house.

"Now, here is the pile, father; which one is it?" she asked, issuing out of a musty cupboard in the study, where a supply of sermons calculated to last three years—no more and no less—was stored.

"Well, I don't know—eh? I've nearly come to the end of my three years, eh? Must begin again very soon, eh?" And he turned them over absently, one by one.

At last Judith found the one he had preached last Sunday; that gave a clue to which one must be preached to-day. It had originally been written for Christmas time—was singularly inappropriate to a hot harvest Sunday. But Parson Ingrey was used to such little difficulties; he would clear his throat once

or twice and so clear the difficulty. He went happily into church, followed by his daughter, fully five minutes after the barrel-organ had given its last groan, and he read his sermon all the way up the aisle, and made his corrections mentally.

It was a beautiful old church, with a bell-tower at the end, in which the ropes were still swinging slowly, as the prayers began. High square pews, painted a fleshy white, did their best or worst, but were hardly successful, in disfiguring it. There were quaint brasses on the walls, from "Thom. Wortleius, priest, A.D. 1492," to "Dame Hariot Wymering," who had left her Prayer-Book and Bible to the Church, with her name and sundry flourishes inscribed in them: "Hariot Wymering—Her Booke, 1651." There was a carved screen, falling to pieces, but beautiful still, rough and unfinished, telling its tale of years by the traces of the axe only, instead of the plane or the carver's instruments of later times. There were monuments barbarous enough here and there, and the pulpit and the reading-desk were piled one upon the other.

In the reading-desk now stands the Parson arranging his hood and stole.

At his right hand sits Mistress Judith, lost in the abyss of the Rectory-pew. At his left, spectacted and

important, stands Jonas Jacklin, the Clerk. All up the aisle, on rickety little benches, is arrayed the extreme youth of Haslington—three and three and three, red heads, brown heads, curly heads, smooth heads, all packed together; anything that can spell *b, o, bo*—nothing that can find its own way into church and open a pew door is here admitted.

Jonas Jacklin frowns alternately at the extreme youth and at the Prayer-Book. Towards the beginning of each prayer the youth is in the ascendant: towards the end the Prayer-Book gets it very hot and strong, for then the “Amen” must be attended to rather than the youth.

On one side of the little fidgeting, surging population of the aisle rises one wall of square pews; into them lumber all the men of Haslington. On the other side the aisle rises another wall of square pews; into them go all the women of Haslington. Poor, little extreme youth, they are hardly dealt with! what chance have they of a quiet pommel now and then—Mr. Cocks towering over the barrel-organ at one end, the women besetting them on one side, the men, fathers and all, on the other—Parson and Jonas Jacklin in the middle?

And yet the worst has not been told. The extreme youth have a greater enemy still. Jonas Jacklin as

Clerk is to be feared ; but Jonas Jacklin has another capacity. As Clerk he is merciful enough ; but as “boy-banger” who *can* be merciful ?

Yes, terrible idea indeed it is to contemplate. A row of fidgeting, surging urchins under six years old, and the eye of a fierce boy-banger overhanging them. If Tommy Bullen from behind, for instance, pinches Joe Mulberry’s ear, and Joe Mulberry hits back with his small elbow into Tommy Bullen’s stomach—why, they know what penalty awaits them. In an instant they are stalked ; Jonas Jacklin’s hands make acquaintance with their ears.

And yet Tommy Bullen *docs* pinch Joe Mulberry’s ears ; Joe Mulberry *docs* sometimes insinuate his small fist into his neighbour’s ribs. There *is* a moment—one short, one blissful moment, when *it* is possible to pinch your neighbour with impunity. It is when Mr. Cocks is safely ensconced behind the barrel-organ, and both Jonas Jacklin and the Parson are hunting for a hymn to suit the tune. Mr. Cocks leaves this deferentially to the Parson ; for one thing he cannot be certain which tune will come up first. Sometimes the organ sticks and squeaks at the Old Hundredth ; then they carry it out of church for a little, shake it well, bring it back, and it plays Luther’s Hymn excellently.

So there is always a pleasing uncertainty about the musical part of the service in Haslington church.

It was at such a juncture, and just as—in accordance with sundry significant winks from Mr. Cocks—the Parson had begun hunting for an eight, eight, eight, eight hymn, that the silence was broken by the opening of the side-door of the church, that groaned and grated heavily on the stone, despite the evident endeavours of the intruder to come in quietly.

The woman next to Jonas Jacklin—for he and the pulpit were on the side of the women—being nudged by her neighbour, nudged the Clerk. The Clerk over the top of his pew nudged the Parson in his reading-desk: after which he fell precipitately out of the pew and into the aisle, and breathing hard, made for Mistress Bullen's great pew opposite Mistress Judith's. He held the door open, but his eyes were as wide, very nearly, as the door.

For up the aisle, past the little boys, walked a tall sunburnt young man who "favoured" Mistress Bullen. With a gentleman's coat upon his back, a gentleman's airs and manners, a gentleman's gold ring upon his hand—who *should* it be? Not Gentleman Bullen?

Come to-day—*to-day* instead of *to-morrow*? How could Haslington say its prayers properly after that?

But one, after the first flush of happiness and sur-

prise had passed from her sweet countenance, bowed her head upon her hands and prayed much better than she had prayed before. Her darling, her son ; she thanked God, and could not be tired of thanking Him. She forgot all about the cloud like a man's hand.

Amos Bullen forgot too, and his heart warmed over his brother. And he felt no jealousy as he saw his mother hold Jesse's hand through the hymn, and through the sermon.

It seemed to Mistress Bullen that she had her sermon beside her, sent of God. She did not hear much of Parson Ingrey's.

But perhaps that was as well.

For the sight of Jesse Bullen had clean-swept the Parson's memory of all corrections and insertions.

Right through from beginning to end he preached his Christmas sermon. And just as he came to the part that had a real atmosphere of holly and snow about it—for the Parson wrote well and vividly when he *did* write—a swallow swept in at the open door and twittered in the rafters ; and little Tommy Bullen walloped the next boy surreptitiously with a dahlia.

And there were all the men with dahlias in their button-holes, open-mouthed, wondering what the

Parson was about, and sitting under him with sunburnt faces.

But neither swallow, nor dahlias, nor open mouths, nor sunburn, made any impression on the Parson. For there was Jesse—his “lad”—come back to him once more.

CHAPTER XVI.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

THAT night Mistress Bullen and her sons sat up very late at Trotter's End. For what was there not to hear and to tell after a year's absence, a year's separation?

And Jesse could tell well: he had a sharp ear and an observant eye; and he knew what was beautiful and what was to be admired as well as any man.

Perhaps that was why, after his mother and Amos had left his room, he sat on by the window, and fell to thinking. Fell to thinking of something much to be admired, something most beautiful, upon which his eyes had fallen that day.

The first eyes that had met his own as he entered Haslington Church were the eyes of Mistress Judith. Did he not know them well? Had they not looked at him at all times and seasons, in all moods, from under sun-bonnets, straw-hats, bonnets and no bonnets, ever since he could remember?

And yet, though there was no hidden meaning in the eyes, nothing beyond an innocent astonishment, they had startled Jesse Bullen.

When he had come home a year ago, he had harboured no warm feeling for Mistress Judith: before he had left a year ago, he had indulged in a little gallantry, perhaps; but the lightest, most trifling gallantry possible. Jesse Bullen was no soft-hearted youth, falling in love at seventeen, and at eighteen, and at nineteen. He would not have been a lad at all, if, thrown constantly into the society of a young girl who was beautiful and the daughter of his patron, he had not said, "If you like soldiers best, I'll be a soldier, Mistress Judith." But as he said it he had smiled: and if it had not suited his tastes and comfort in other ways, the soldierhood would long ago have been foregone. Jesse had been out in the world: words that would have come hot from the heart of Amos meant nothing on his lips.

It is true that towards the close of his year of absence Jesse had begun to think a little of Judith. We have seen that, by his letter to Parson Ingrey; which however compromised him not at all. But he had thought of her as he had left her: still with frocks that did not touch the ground; still sunburnt, childish, unfinished altogether. A year's absence he

felt had made him more than her equal,—her superior. And had he not seen fifty women, beautiful and graceful and *finished*, fifty more beautiful than the little country thing of sixteen he remembered—who had been courteous to him, more courteous by far than Judith? Eventually—there was no saying—Mistress Judith Ingrey *might* be the right wife for him. Up to the present time, he had had no other feeling than a little curiosity when he thought of her at all: much the same interest that his father would have had looking at a calf in a neighbour's field, and thinking if he found he had not enough cattle to graze his own, he might inquire the price of that calf, and a few others of the same breed.

So she was not in Jesse's mind at all as he came into the church; it was more of what Haslington folk would say of him, and of his mother, that he thought.

And when he met the eyes of Mistress Judith, and saw the sun in a dusty beam shining upon her hair over the great square pew, he was a little startled. Surely this was something more than the Mistress Judith he remembered.

Afterwards, when he had come into the Rectory garden, and Parson Ingrey had walked up and down, up and down, with his arm over his shoulder, he had

been made quite sure that this *was* more than the Mistress Judith of a year ago. Tall now, with a white dress that touched the ground, the beautiful oval of her face filled out with the round soft beauty of early girlhood, the hair thicker, heavier, more lustrous than ever, gathered up in womanly fashion on her head; and then those eyes, which surely *must* have changed a little, grown larger and greyer and more expressive. He did not stay to count the particulars as he watched her: he was astonished only that he had been mistaken, and that this Mistress Judith was not what he had taken her to be.

For one thing, instead of feeling himself her superior, she was higher above him than she had ever been before. It was not that she was proud or cold in her manner; she did not speak a great deal, it is true, and what she said was innocent enough. But for all her playing with Bully, and her childish ways, an atmosphere hung about such as the moon wears to little children who cry for her. Beautiful, and hardly knowing it; shining down softly, and yet such a long way off,—that was just the impression Judith made on Jesse Bullen. And this puzzled him, and he could not analyse the feeling. He only knew his calculations had been at fault: that if occasion should require it—and of this he was not in the least

degree certain—he should have to climb up, up, and not to stoop down.

Jesse did not like being puzzled, or put out in his calculations. And that was why he sat up after Amos and his mother had gone. Not because the eyes of Mistress Judith had made havoc in his heart and kept him from sleep. Jesse, as we have said, was not so foolish.

That night nothing passed between the brothers about Amos's wish of leaving home. Each was strong in his own determination: Amos to go, Jesse to oppose that going. Mutually they forebore that first night to touch on a discussion which must end adversely for one, or, worse still, in disagreement and bad feeling.

But Amos Bullen prayed that night that his tongue might be held and his temper straitened. He had prayed a good deal since Mistress Judith had come into his life. It seemed to him that the very thought of her must have its temple.

And Jesse, when he had lost the smell of the hayricks in the smell of his cigar, and closing the window, had betaken himself to bed, had come to the conclusion that Mistress Judith had grown very beautiful. If she were dressed like other women—by “other women” Jesse Bullen meant women of the

world such as he had seen—she would outshine them all. As it was, she was beautiful, in spite of being countrified, in spite of the small straw-bonnet which was not the least “the thing” to wear now. If he ever—— And here Jesse Bullen fell asleep, in the heavy old carved bedstead of his fathers.

The next day Jesse set out early for the Rectory. There was much to talk of with the Parson, who was restless from breakfast-time, going out and in to the house with his newspaper, and looking down the road; waiting for his lad with the light step and the bright eye, who had been so long away. The same indescribable pleasure that came to Judith from the sight and the tending of her roses came to her father at the sight of Jesse; and Jesse’s heart warmed too as he saw the Parson’s smile of welcome, and knew that his coming had not been forgotten.

Judith was doing up the weekly bills in the little drawing-room. She did not like sums at all; and when she had to do them she gathered up her hair unconsciously with an extra hair-pin to help her brain, and to keep it together. She was very glad now and then to look up from the butcher’s book, or the washing bill, to watch her father and Jesse pacing the garden. Up and down, up and down; they would

surely wear a path in the soft lawn if they went on much longer.

And they went on till the dinner-bell rang at two o'clock, and then the Parson, still with his arm round his shoulders, led Jesse into the house. He would have forgotten to ask any one else to come in, if fifty dinner-bells had rung; but he did not forget to ask Jesse

“I hope I am not putting you to inconvenience, Mistress Judith,” said Jesse, taking off his hat as he came in, and sitting down with a mixture of ease and deference that was very taking—“Mr. Ingrey has been so kind as to ask me to come in, and I had no wish to refuse. Let me open the door,” he added, stepping forward and holding it wide till Judith and her father had passed out.

And then he came and sat down with them, nodding and saying a kind word to Ruth, and then telling the Parson just what he liked to hear. And in his conversation, as in his manner, there was that indefinable something which stamps the gentleman. Judith, pulling her grapes to pieces, skinning one for Bully, and listening to what Jesse told her father, felt that that father had good reason to be proud of his “lad.”

She had been a little shy of him at first, as girls are

wont to be with those who have been their familiars in childhood, and whom they meet again in early womanhood. And since her childhood she had seen very little of Jesse.

Now his perfect self-possession set her at ease too. After dinner, while the Parson dozed a little in his chair, she found herself strolling with him in the garden. And when she strolled there, what else should she do but show him her roses? And when she had shown him her roses, there were the cocks and hens and the white rabbits, he remembered.

And after she had shown them all, she had a little pang of remorse, just for an instant. She had taken up a new friend too lightly, perhaps. She had been letting him into all the innocent little confidences she had with Amos. And Amos was, after all, her old, old friend. Jesse had never been her favourite. She hoped she had not been at all unfaithful to her old friend, who was going away. Then she said suddenly to Jesse,—

“I suppose Amos is soon going?”

“Well, I hope not, Mistress Judith; it’ll be a bad day for the farm when he goes,” he added.

“That it will,” she returned. “And for the people too—because all the people hold by Amos, you see,” she added, noticing that Jesse looked at her suddenly

with a new expression that might mean he was pained ; “they have not had you to share the liking, Jesse, because you have been so much away. But I hope Amos ’ll get away now for a bit,” she said, picking a piece of jessamine from the wall and smelling it. “I shall miss him sorely, for I’ve no other friend that is young but him. But I hope he’ll go, that I do ; it’s best for him to go, I am certain.”

“I wonder he’s so anxious to go,” said Jesse meaningly. It was quite a new light to him this, that Amos and Mistress Judith were “friends.” Playmates they had been certainly ; but when Jesse had been at home before, Amos durst hardly come within the Rectory gates.

It was six o’clock when Jesse sauntered back to Trotter’s End. On the bridge he found Amos, leaning and brooding over the water. He did not move his broad shoulders as his brother drew near, though he turned his head slightly at the sound of footsteps. His face was not so cloudless as was its wont.

Jesse put his hand on his neck.

“Where have you been ?” he asked lightly.

“Where ? in your field I suppose,” said Amos. “Some one must look after the men.”

“You’ve done well by me, Amos,” said Jesse.

“And it’ll be a bad day for me when you say you’ll go. But I hope it won’t be yet a while, lad. I’ll make you any offer that’s fair if you’ll stay and look after the farm till spring at least, when I’ll be free to think about such matters.”

Amos lifted up his great person from the bridge, and looked at his brother.

“Jesse,” said he, “I’m a dunderhead, I know. And I’m ‘Farmer’ Bullen, whereas you’re ‘Gentleman.’ But I’ve got a mind to make up, and I’ve made up mine. I’ve been to the field for the last time to-day—unless I can be of use putting *you* up to anything; then I’ll go, and gladly. But I’ve a life before me’s well’s you, lad, and——”

“Don’t put yourself out,” interrupted Jesse, walking slowly towards the house. “It’s not a matter of life and death.”

CHAPTER XVII.

AMOS STRIKES.

NEXT morning, when the sun rose and the cocks crowed, the cocks and Jephtha Parcell missed Amos for the first time in the farmyard. Jephtha could hardly believe his senses as five and six and seven o'clock struck, and the gleaming-bell pealed from the church steeple, and all the women hurried out with their great cloths and their babies, and the blind was still down in Master Amos's room. Jael and Jephtha had a long talk over it and affairs in general at Trotter's End, while Jael ought to have been milking the cows, and Jephtha, who had watered the horses, ought to have been out harvesting. Every hand was needed now, and men who lived all the year round (with families ranging from two to fourteen) on eleven and twelve shillings a week, were earning from sixteen to twenty in the harvest fields. It was hard enough work—up long before daybreak and after dark ; but still sixteen and twenty shillings

were worth earning, and no one complained of Amos, who was a good master.

All the men, like Jephtha and Jael, noticed that he did not come into the field for the first time since many a day. They all knew the sound of the dun mare's hoofs as she stepped along the road—the click of the gate, that Amos opened with his cane; and then the ambling of the mare over the stubble, as she switched her tail to right and left, and bent her pretty head to her knee to drive off the teasing flies that settled on her sleek skin.

Jesse did not ride so well as Amos; he had had no practice since he was a lad, and then he had not much love for the exercise. And the men, who were no riders themselves, noticed the difference when Jesse, instead of Amos, came through the field and wished them good morning.

But he did not stop to look at their work, as Amos had been used to do. He only passed by, and turned towards the Rectory, when he had joined the road.

The men noticed this too, and wondered. A stranger who had come to make an extra hand, but who had been enlightened as to the Bullens' affairs in the tap-room, suggested drily that the brothers were on strike. "Depend upon it that's

it ; t'other one he's struck—and the Master he won't give in."

This sally was received with great applause and laughter.

"May be," said the man, encouraged by success and beer—"may be it's a shillin' a day he's struck for,—and may be it's a young 'ooman."

"Gen'leman Bullen, he's rid along that way," said one of the men, "he's rid that way any how."

"Oh ay—he's sweet on Mistress Judith sure enough—leastways that's the talk in the gleanin' field," said another.

"Durstn't credit all as I hears from them gleanin' fields," said an older man, who had learnt by experience that reports from the gleanin' fields were not infallible.

And then they fell to working again, the sickle going with a soft swish through the heavy barley, and bringing it down in golden heaps as if to strew a king's pathway.

Jesse Bullen had "rid" to the Rectory. But he stopped short of the Rectory at Master Hurst's gate.

There was Mistress Judith on her knees before the bee-hive, while the old man sat on the bench against the wall under his vine, held his stiff knees, and looked at her.

“Do you see how they air the hive, Master Hurst?” said Judith. “They’re sitting by turns at the door, and fanning their wings like any thing. Oh, do just look, Master Hurst!”

Jesse had hesitated a moment at the gate. What an odd fancy Judith had to this old man! But the voice that reached him across the thyme and the dahlias had something in it that put an end to his hesitation. Haslington was a very dull place; seeing Mistress Judith was not unpleasant; even old Hurst was better than no one, and he could go on to the Rectory afterwards. Jesse wanted to go to the Rectory as much as possible; he wanted little by little to impress on the Parson that there was a probability—at least a *possibility*—that the examination in spring might not be passed. Jesse was clever, and he knew it; but he was cautious too. He liked just to find out how things would be, supposing he should fail. And at present the idea stoutly refused to reach Parson Ingrey’s brain. He spoke of the examination as he would of going to bed, and only felt now and then, in spite of himself, a pang of regret that his “lad” was not going in for honours at Cambridge instead of for a miserable test that any one could pass with flying colours.

“Good morning!” said Jesse, when he had called

an urchin to hold his horse, and was coming up Master Hurst's pathway. "Good morning, Hurst, and how are you?"

"Wonderful comical—O wonderful comical, I think ye, sir," said the old man, lifting his dim eyes to Jesse's face. "And how be you, sir?"

"Very well, Hurst, and glad to be at home again. What are the bees doing?" he asked, coming behind Judith, who was still kneeling.

"Watching them airing the hive. How *wonderful* they are, aren't they? Just look here—that one has done its turn; now you'll see another come out directly!"

"Are they Hurst's bees?" asked Jesse.

"Yes, of course. Only he's going to give them to me; aren't you, Hurst?"

"No, not give 'em, Missus—not give 'em," said the old man thickly. "They say as bees won't thrive an you give 'em."

"Well, but I'm to give you a fourpenny-bit—that's all."

"Must have silver for 'em—must have silver," he said, shaking his old head gravely.

Jesse was not at home with bees. He kept a safe distance in case they should sting him, and he did not know what to say on the matter. He began to

wish Judith would stop watching them and come over to the Rectory.

"When did they swarm?" he asked at last, by way of a remark.

"Two month ago," said Judith eagerly; "Joe Gadd got the first swarm—off the elm near the inn; and Mistress Saggers got another."

"Is there more than one, then?"

"One? why——" and Judith got up from her knees, pushed her hat back, and began counting on her fingers—"there's the swarm, and the maiden-swarm, and the cast, and the colt, and the filly; I don't know if there are any more."

"Who taught you that?" asked Jesse, smiling, and thinking he had never seen anything so pretty as Judith looked this morning. So fresh and innocent too, with her half-childish, half-womanlike ways: for before he had finished speaking, she had betaken herself to the womanlike, and was giving Master Hurst his stick and helping him to get up to his feet.

"Why, Master Hurst of course, and all the people; they all know that. And they know they must 'tell' the bees—don't they, Master Hurst?"

"Ay, ay—they must tell the bees."

"What?" asked Jesse, still smiling, and following, as they made for the door.

“When any one’s dead, you know,” began Judith.

“Not any one, Missus,” said Master Hurst, stopping short, and looking very gravely at his guide, “on’y the Master o’ the bees. The Master, ye see.” And he hobbled on again.

“Yes, the Master,” said Judith. “When he dies, some one must run out and tell the bees—mustn’t they, Master Hurst?—or else they’ll all die.”

Jesse laughed.

“And what’s more,” said Judith, “they must put a bit of crape on the hive; the bees must go into mourning. You don’t believe it?” she said indignantly; “well, you’d best try and see whether it isn’t true.”

“Don’t be angry,” said Jesse, still smiling a little, in spite of himself, but wishing more than ever that Judith would get rid of her old man, and attend to him. “At all events I hope these bees won’t have to be told in my life-time,” he added more gently—“if they’ve passed out of Hurst’s hands, as you say they have.”

“Not till I get the fourpenny-bit,” said Judith. “I tell you it isn’t lucky. I’m going to lock up Master Hurst now; you stay down-stairs, because the stair is very narrow.”

“What are you going to do after that?” asked

Jesse humbly, looking up, where he was forbidden to go.

"Take the key to Mistress Hurst in the gleaning field," said she, slowly helping the old man up the stair. "He doesn't like it being left in the door since one day a tramp tried to get in."

And a few minutes afterwards Jesse found himself leading the mare along the road, getting a white coat of dust upon his boots, and side by side with Judith. He had come down to see the Parson, and to go to the Rectory. Instead of doing either, he was going to the gleaning field, helping to take an old man's key to his old woman. He wondered at himself for what he was doing, but he went on.

Close to the gleaning field Amos sprang over a hedge and met them.

"You're wanted," he said to Jesse, and a look of sharp suspicion came into his eyes as he saw Mistress Judith with his brother. "You're wanted in the west field, where the men are carting."

"The west field must mind itself," said Jesse carelessly; "for the present I am otherwise occupied."

"The men'll be waiting, won't they, Jesse?" said Judith.

"Oh no," said Jesse. "They've got nothing to

ask me that Amos couldn't have told them. He knows more than I do."

"Won't you come up and see the gleaning, Amos?" asked Judith, turning round.

But Amos was gone, and he had not so much as wished her good-day. How strange of Amos!

CHAPTER XVIII.

GOOD-BYE AND NO GOOD-BYE.

THE next night when Mistress Bullen had wished her lads good night, and sleepy Jael had turned down the lamp on the landing, and clumped off to bed, Amos, with his elbows on the window-sill, and his face between his hands, watched the light in the Parson's study, and communed with himself.

Jesse had been only two or three days at home; and yet Amos felt that the time had been as long as years, and that jealousy, that vile green serpent, had crept into his honest breast.

He was restless and miserable: he did not know his own mind, or what he wanted. He wanted to go—for what chance had he of raising himself if he stayed here as the hired servant of his brother? He wanted to stay to be near Mistress Judith. If he went—why, there was Jesse—always to be with her, always near her—while he was far away.

“He doesn't love,” said Amos to himself; “he doesn't love her; he don't speak of her as if he loved

her ; he couldn't be so light-hearted if he loved her." But—if he should be always near her—hearing the sound of that voice, seeing those trustful eyes—learning to know how beautiful her soul was, as well as the face that pictured it—would he not get to love her? Was it not possible at least?

Amos moved his elbows, as if they pained him ; that possibility was more than he could brook. He ran his fingers through his hair, and passed his hand over his forehead. There was one way to avert the evil, only one. Jesse did not love Mistress Judith yet ; when he came he did not love her—that was certain ; three days could not have made him love her, said Amos, whose love was of so long a growth, so deep-rooted that he could not tell when it had risen, or where it had stretched to. He was beginning now to know how far it had stretched ; Jesse had touched him a great way off, and his foolish heart had vibrated as if a hand had been laid upon it.

And it was time to speak now, surely. If he delayed there was no saying but Jesse might urge a claim as great as his own. Now it could not be so. Now it was time to speak, to throw himself on his brother's honour, and so to find peace again.

The smoke of Jesse's cigar came round the corner on the soft night air. Amos stirred himself, took up

the candle that had been spluttering and running in the breeze, and in another moment was at Jesse's door.

At twelve o'clock that night, and at half-past twelve, the brothers were still together—Jesse, cross-legged upon the window-seat, with his cigar between his fingers, tapping it against the sill, and listening patiently to Amos's story.

Amos, in the full light of the sputtering candle, leant upon the table; his large eyes were unnaturally bright, and the great hands, that were stripping a rose-leaf into a hundred pieces, shook as if they were aspen leaves; no, not so—they shook as strong things do that have a great power in them for good or evil.

And Jesse listened and listened. He was a wonderfully patient listener.

When one o'clock struck out clear through the stillness, he uncrossed his legs and yawned.

"I expect it's time we were tucked up," he said, stretching himself, and he carried one of the candles to the looking-glass, where he took up a brush and smoothed back his hair.

Amos, still stripping busily at the rose-leaf, did not hear.

Jesse tossed up his hair with the comb, and passed his hand over his upper lip, as he had a way of doing.

There was one crop—to be grown there—that he took some interest in. A sharper man than Amos would have been puzzled by the expression of his handsome face. As it was, Amos did not look up at all.

Jesse repeated his impression that it was time they were in bed.

Then Amos gathered up his long legs, left the rose-leaf, and took up his candle. He laid his broad hand on Jesse's shoulder.

"God bless you, lad," he said; "I'm afraid I'm a wearisome talker to-night; but I thank you for listening, and for saying you'll try and do without me on the farm for a while, now you know how hard it is for me to stop. You can't understand it, lad, I see, but you can believe it. I'm a sight easier in my mind than I've been these many months past."

"That's right, lad—go to bed," said Jesse, "and dream of your Princess."

"I don't deny it makes me easy too," said Amos, musing, at the door, with the handle in his hand, "to think I needn't speak to the Parson. I was in two minds about that, lad—that I was. It didn't seem open somehow, hanging about her and not telling him what's in my mind. But as you say, lad, it wouldn't be any use—only bold and forward—going now before I'd done anything towards raising myself; he's

never been a great friend to me anyhow, and he'd just give me the kick-out—that's all. And then, maybe," said Amos, lowering his voice, and a soft light flooding his eyes as he bent them over the candle—"may be she'd fret and not understand. And she'd take it hard if she mightn't see an old friend perhaps. But I'll not hang about her now. God help me! it's a bit hard—it'll be hard for a while—but then I'll get away, Jesse, lad—and I trust to you to help me to do that soon. I don't think I can bide here much longer, lad, and not speak out."

"Get to bed, then," said Jesse, "and Heaven preserve me from being in love. It seems a sore malady!"

And Amos slept like a child that night, and had no evil dreams to disturb his rest. He must forego seeing Mistress Judith—and was not that foregoing the sun itself? But he was going straight forward on the honest path; and he had a great will, and a great heart, and a great love. And now there was no fear of Jesse; it seemed to Amos there never had been fear. But it was safe enough *now* at all events. He had cast himself upon his brother's honour; and now might God help him for the rest!

"Jesse'll be seeing her often," said Amos, as he laid his head on the pillow—"so long as he's at home;

and he'll look after her—and write and tell me how she fares.” And then he bid God bless her out of his soul, and fell asleep.

And next day he rose with a load taken from him. He was only vexed now that he had been surly with Jesse without cause. He could not muster the words with which to tell this to his brother; but all the day and every day that he remained at the farm he did his best to atone for the past.

He went into the field as before, carrying Jesse's messages, and seeing his wishes carried out.

The brothers were so united again that Mistress Bullen almost wept for joy.

Jesse did not say much about Amos's going; but his silence meant consent. Mistress Bullen gladly undertook the farm, till such time as the examination was over, when Jesse could see and judge what was best to do. And there was no fear of the farm in Mistress Bullen's keeping.

“May be I'll take it myself, lad,” said Amos, “if you'll trust me again with it. That is, if I can get Camber's farm, and be close at hand to look after things a bit for you.”

And Jesse said he thought that might do very well.

In the meantime Amos settled to leave Haslington

in three days' time ; just ten days after Jesse had returned.

As the time grew near he longed for it more than he dreaded it. It was hard work stopping there, and dropping out of his life all the sweetness of it.

He shunned the Rectory gate, or rode quickly past it, hardly letting himself look in at the forbidden fruit. But a round straw-hat moved beyond the hedge, and a voice spoke often, as he passed. Not to him ; but to some pet bird, to Bully, to rough Ruth, or to Master Hurst.

To go in and see her, to hear she was sorry he was going—ah, if he could ! But no—hadn't Jesse said it was not fair and honest ? hadn't Jesse showed him it was not fair to Mistress Judith herself ?

Amos knew nothing of love, save as it had come to him. He did not think all was fair in war and love. He had a few broad strong lines of right and wrong which he held to with unswerving rectitude. Anything false, unfair, anything that did not savour of frankness and truth, was hateful in his eyes. If he could not tell the Parson of his love—and he felt as yet he dared not—neither could he or should he trust himself with Mistress Judith.

The last day came ; and Amos knew he must go and say good-bye. He would put it off till the last

hour, the very last hour he could with propriety intrude himself on the Parson.

Jesse had ridden to Cambridge to get a book he wanted for the examination; he would not be back till dark. Mistress Bullen, sighing now and then, was mending shirts and socks for her Benjamin. He had been a good deal with her that day; he felt a little downcast—his work at the old place was over; and he hardly knew what he had before him. He was leaving his mother, who was downcast too; he was leaving the old folks of Haslington, who had got to be his friends, and he would never be to them as he had been before. It would not be his place any longer to counsel them, to help them out of their difficulties, to apportion their work with some regard to their age and their strength. And he had no refuge from his melancholy now. He looked at the Rectory windows across the fields, and knew he could not go there; not till six o'clock, when it would be getting dark; and then it would be to say good-bye.

At five o'clock he came out of the house, and leaned upon the bridge. The great red sun was taking its evening look into the sluggish water. Up and down, up and down, the swan was sailing. Little fish appeared suddenly and plumped again with a splash into the water. And the trails of ivy were drawn by

the feeble current under the bridge, where there was a clear sandy pool, grown over with waving weeds, among which the minnows were darting.

Amos looked up the stream, where it lost itself in a green vista ; a little lower, where a garden of tall rushes bowed from either side and touched ; lower still, and nearer, where it widened, and the garden came down to meet it on one side and the paddock on the other.

He looked at the face of the sun, and at his own face, in the water ; he looked at the swan, the fishes, the sandy pool. But he was listening for the first stroke of six from the church clock ; and as it fell, he lifted himself from the bridge, and went down the road to the Rectory.

Mistress Bullen, with her hand over her eyes, stood at the window and saw him go.

In three minutes' time his hand was on the gate ; he had crossed the pathway, and was knocking at the half-open door.

Ruth took some time to answer ; when she came she was wiping her bare arms with her apron. Surely the house was very still.

“ Master Ingrey—he be gone out, sir—and Mistress Judith too—they be gone Paxton ways, I'm thinking, in the four-wheel. Didn't leave no word as when

they'd be home ; I think as they'll took tea along of the minister at Paxton ; leastways Missus Judith, she got a letter, and it's like it were from the minister's lady—I were a-washin', and the mile-man he comes along, just as I moight be standin' here, ye see—and says he to me——”

But Amos had turned away, and the garden gate swung back and closed itself, as his step went heavily up the road.

At the corner where the roads meet below Trotter's End, he met Jesse riding leisurely home, and by his side, with his basket on his arm, walked Paxton Dick, looking on the ground as usual.

“Where have you been, lad?” asked Jesse.

But Amos did not answer. He did not care to say before Paxton Dick where he had been. And Paxton Dick walked up to Trotter's End by Jesse ; saying he had some eggs for Jephtha Parcell.

“I suppose Parson was out, lad?” asked Mistress Bullen, when they had sat down to tea in the low dining-room with its black oak wainscoat and mantel-shelf.

“Yes, mother, he was out ; gone to Paxton.”

So he had had an interview with Mistress Judith alone probably, thought Jesse, and whistled mentally.

Next morning the gig was at the door betimes, and Jephtha was carefully putting in Jesse's empty portmanteau, instead of Amos's full one, when he was told rather roughly to use his eyes, and such wits as he had been blessed with.

It was only six o'clock : the air was fresh from sleep ; the gleaners were hardly astir yet, though here and there in the village a housewife was dressing her children, or shaking a bit of carpet at the door.

The cocks were strutting in the yard, and the cows were lowing, because they had not been milked. And Jael stood crying in the doorway, seeing the last of Master Amos.

"Good-bye, mother, and God bless thee," he said at last, putting his arm round her and kissing her once. And then he shook Jesse by the hand, and said, aside,—

"I trust you to tell me about her, lad—I trust you. And if anything should go amiss with her, or that——"

"Get in then, will 'ee, Maister," said Abraham, the ploughman, who was holding the horse ; "them railway 'chines doesn't wite for no man, so I hears."

And Amos jumped up, took the reins in his hands, and in an instant was out of sight.

Master Hurst looked out of his window and waved his red handkerchief feebly.

But out of the lattice across the road looked no one. Only the morning sun shone back from the gable. Very coldly, thought Amos Bullen; very coldly the sun shone.

CHAPTER XIX.

PERPLEXITY, AND PAXTON DICK.

JESSE BULLEN was in a perplexed mood, now that Amos was gone. Yesterday he had indulged unconsciously in a secret satisfaction at the thought of being master of the field, and amusing himself as he liked with pretty Mistress Judith. As he had ridden along the Cambridge road he had thought quite as much, perhaps more, of his examination than of her; but he had thought of her too, and it gave him a sense of pleasantness when he turned his horse's head homewards to think that Haslington was not such a dull place after all. He even looked up and down as he came within a mile or two of the village, to see if a large straw-hat were anywhere to be seen.

He had got the book he wanted, and he was trying to put the thought of the examination from him, that he might enjoy pleasanter thoughts; and altogether the world seemed worth living in, just for the present, in spite of having left Paris and come home.

But a mile or two from home things changed. Instead of Mistress Judith, Paxton Dick had been overtaken on the road. He had doffed his hat obsequiously to Jesse, and Jesse had swallowed the bait, slackened pace, and begun to talk.

He had no intention of a conversation when he began. But there were two voices in that matter. Paxton Dick intended fully that there should be a conversation, and he was clever enough to reckon upon Jesse's gentlemanly manners at first, and on the interest of his information later, to insure a hearing. Amos would have given him the cold shoulder at once, or a surly "good night," and ridden off. But Jesse was not Amos.

He almost began to think Amos must be him, however, by the time Paxton Dick had finished. *Amos* talked of with Mistress Judith—Amos venturing to have serious thoughts of gaining her! Impossible, said Jesse to himself; quite impossible. If it had been he that was talked of—well, that would have been premature to say the least of it; but *Amos!* the idea was absurd.

Jesse laughed as Paxton Dick talked—at first innocently, as if he too believed the village gossip. Then he veered round and took the other view, and said he didn't see how it could be possible; *he* had

always said it wasn't possible, that it would not be after the Parson's mind—the Parson, who held so by *scholars*; and here Paxton Dick blinked at his eggs. But certainly there had been ground for it, and he, Paxton Dick, thought he'd better just mention it to Jesse, who might mention it to the Parson. It was a pity the young lady should get talked about, thought Paxton Dick.

And then, because Jesse was too proud to gratify him by asking what they said, his informant told him graphically certain points and scenes which, told as he told them, were no doubt a little startling. They dropped out quite naturally and easily from the hawker's lips. It seemed as if sitting under the porch in the dark with Amos were quite a trifling everyday occurrence; only one night Paxton Dick had happened unfortunately to spill his eggs there just at the gate, and Amos had not looked well-pleased when he came out and saw that any one had had a chance of hearing or looking on. And he, Paxton Dick, thought he'd best just mention it to Jesse, as “the young lady had no one to look after her, like, no mother, nor nothing.”

There was a *bonne-bouche*, and such a one! which had not been told, when they came upon Amos at the cross roads. It was just as well, thought the

hawker: it might come in with more effect one of these days. He was a little disappointed at the coolness which Jesse displayed all through his narration, but sometimes folks were cold outside and hot in.

When Jesse called out "Where have you been?" and Amos made no answer, Paxton Dick blinked again at his eggs, and ventured to raise his bleary eyes a little above Jesse's boot. But he said nothing; it was unnecessary—after his conversation nothing more opportune could possibly have happened. There was Amos, on the road from the Rectory, and refusing to answer. Paxton Dick hoisted his basket with renewed energy, and with a dogged insolent boldness held to his place by Jesse's side till they got to Trotter's End.

When Amos said that night that the Parson had been out, Jesse never doubted that he had seen Judith. He could not well ask; but he said to himself that for once Paxton Dick seemed to be not so far from the truth.

He could not dismiss the idea from his mind. It rankled there a good deal during the long evening that was Amos's last. He was glad it was Amos's last; for out in the world he would forget these foolish fancies, and it certainly was best that he should go.

When Amos came that night, and told him all his story, he listened, and said to himself all the while—"So Paxton Dick spoke true!" It came in like a refrain after every fresh outpouring, and it did not make him feel more comfortable by any means. That the Parson would not approve was certain; but then Mistress Judith's opinion would have some weight. And women were wonderful in their loves and likings. Jesse knew enough to know there was no rule of expediency for them.

After Amos was gone, Jesse could not say he was distressed or anxious. It would all blow off now easily enough. But still it was tiresome, this confidence of Amos; he, Jesse, rather wished Amos had kept his own business to himself. He wanted to have gone freely backwards and forwards to the Rectory to see the Parson; and Mistress Judith too—why not? Now he felt as if Amos had thrown a shackle over him, and he was teased by it. It teased him for two days, and those two days he did not go to the Rectory.

The third day the Parson, who had missed his "lad," took up his hat to go out.

"Where are you going, father?" asked Mistress Judith, looking up from her book. The last two days

she had read a great deal in the window-seat of the study.

“Up to Trotter’s End ; will you come ?” he asked, from the hall.

It was a moment before Judith answered. Then she said—

“No ; thank you, Father—I’m reading.”

It would not have been a satisfactory answer to every one. But the Parson had forgotten he had asked her before she had time to answer, and was half way towards the gate.

When he had gone, Judith sat looking after him, with the open book on her lap, for a long time. Her face was rather grave, and the tone of her voice as she answered her father had not the same ring in it as usual. She sighed once as she sat musing, as if she were tired or troubled. A little trouble tires one a deal more than a long walk.

Ruth came in before very long, and did not like to see her so grave. She told her so very plainly.

“They’ll be s’ying you be fretting after Maister Amos an ye doan’t moind. They be s’ying that a’ready.”

Judith flamed up in an instant, though she hardly coloured outwardly.

“Master Amos ! They’d best hold their tongues.

Master Amos! he didn't so much as come to say good-bye to me—so it's very likely he's my sweetheart." And she turned to the window again, her lips still pouting indignantly.

"Didn't he though? he *de-id* then," said Ruth drawling. "He come noight afore last—no, noight afore that—was it? and ast as you was at home, and you warn't."

"You never told me," said Judith, and now she did colour a little.

"Telled 'e Parson, I did—telled 'un as sune 's iver he got over the door. If I'd thought he wouldn't but tell you, *I'd* 'ave telled you, I would."

"Of course he forgot," said Judith. "You *know* he can't remember."

And she turned to the window again, and then to her book, to get rid of Ruth. And already her face looked less tired. Amos had not been quite so unkind after all. He had tried to say good-bye, and that was something.

It had troubled her greatly—this going of Amos without a word of farewell. She could not understand it; it was so unlike kind, open-hearted Amos. She could not help contrasting it with his behaviour at other times. She could not help thinking of words he had said to her, and of looks, and of silences she

could not understand but that had almost frightened her. And then all had changed so suddenly. Since Jesse came she had hardly seen Amos. He had never said more than to tell her the day he had fixed for going, when she had spoken to him over Master Hurst's hedge as he came down the road.

Even then he had seemed impatient to get away from her. And if he had wanted to say good-bye, said Judith, he *could* have done it. He could have come more than once; he could have come earlier, not putting it off till the very last hour. He *could* have done it, said Judith, and her trouble began to change to anger, as women's moods will.

Then she heard steps on the road, and the latch of the gate lifted. She ran out to meet her father. He was her own, always the same; he was never fickle, never changeable.

She almost started when she saw Jesse with him. He too had been a stranger the last three days. She felt a little jealous of Jesse for the first time, as she saw her father with his arm upon his shoulder, bringing Jesse in. She wanted her father; she wanted him all to herself. She wanted something at that moment that was her own, and that did not change.

So her countenance fell when she saw Jesse. He noticed the fall, and did not like it. He noticed too that she looked much graver than he remembered.

Could it be possible that she was troubled because Amos was gone?

No, said Jesse, she never mentions him.

It was quite true; she never mentioned Amos all that day.

The Parson kept Jesse for tea, and it was nine o'clock when he went away. He felt quite innocent as he walked home in the dark; he had not made any love to Mistress Judith.

But he could not help pondering over her grave face, that fell when he approached her. What could Amos have said to her, in that last meeting, when the Parson was at Paxton, and they must have been alone? Amos could not have told her of his love, that was certain. Jesse never doubted Amos's word in that matter. But there was the spirit as well as the letter; what might not be said might have been implied. Looks could say what words could not. Why, in the very voice in which he said good-bye he could tell her that he loved her. Jesse knew as much as that, though he had never been in love.

CHAPTER XX.

THE LETTER THAT WENT TO AMOS.

TWO mornings after this the Parson set forth again to find his lad. He did not like being two whole days without seeing him.

It was a beautiful fresh harvest morning, and Judith's spirits had risen. She was not going to fret about Amos; if Amos did not care to say good-bye to her, she had her father and Bully, and they were always true, always the same.

"Where are you going, father?" she asked again, as he left his books and went to look for his hat. It was one of the few things he remembered to do. Judith was turning out a rag-bag in a cupboard.

The Parson was half ashamed to say he was going to Trotter's End again. He felt it was not a bit like himself to do it.

"Ah—up the village," he said hesitatingly, and then in a nonchalant tone—"And perhaps I may look up the lad, and bring him home to lunch. I have got some papers to shew him."

“Oh then, if you’re going up the village, father, I wish you’d call at Mistress Mulberry’s, Joe’s wife, and give her these rags.”

“Rags, eh?” said the Parson absently—“rags?”

“Yes—she wants them; they’re linen, and her hand has never healed yet. Don’t you remember how ill she was three months ago?”

“Oh—ah—ill, eh? she was ill, was she?”

“Yes, you went to see her; she was very ill, and the baby died. Don’t ask after the baby, father, remember!”

“Rags?” said the Parson, putting on his hat. “Dead, eh? rags?”

And so went out, putting the little bundle in his pocket.

As he passed a door at the upper end of the village, a woman came out suddenly to lift her “lap-full” into the house, where it was to be threshed in homely fashion upon the floor with great flails. Her appearance recalled Judith’s message to the Parson’s mind. He knew Mistress Mulberry lived thereabouts.

“Oh—ah—you are Mrs. Mulberry, I think?” he said.

“Naw, sir, two do-ar fur’er up—this side them brick housen.”

Arrived at the right door, the Parson tried to

remember why he had come there. It was something about health, he was certain. Ill, eh? he was sure Judith had said she was ill.

Mistress Mulberry, a young woman with clear blue eyes and large teeth, was sitting in the chimney corner, brooding over the pot upon the fire. She had a very sad wistful expression, as she looked up when the Parson's tall figure darkened the doorway.

"Oh—ah—Good morning, Mrs. Mulberry, my dear," he said very kindly. "And how's the baby?"

Mistress Mulberry made no answer. She cast up her eyes once with a sorrowful reproach at the Parson. Then she turned away her head, and looked again at the pot on the fire.

And he, looking round, saw the empty wicker-cradle in the corner; all new and white and unused; and the little patch-work quilt folded away upon it. He could say nothing; but into his keen brown eyes the tears welled up suddenly, and he turned upon his heel, and went away.

It was not the first time, nor the second, nor the third, that the Parson had put that question; and each time he had received the same answer from the empty cradle. But association was too strong for him—he remembered seeing a baby in that room, and

was certain it was Mistress Mulberry's baby : he had baptized it there too. That he had buried it before it was one day old, that had quite passed from him. Poor Parson Ingrey, who would not have hurt a worm knowingly !

Judith's bundle of rags travelled safely up to Trotter's End, and safely home again, when he walked back with Jesse.

"I'm sure Amos can't accuse me of poaching on his preserves," said Jesse to himself. "If I keep away I'm fetched directly." And then he smiled at the idea of the Rectory being Amos's preserve ; any one's preserve but his own indeed : he who had almost lived there since he was a boy : he who was almost essential to the Parson's happiness. It was not a little flattering to a young man to be sought out by such a man as Parson Ingrey, a reserved, reticent, absent scholar. No wonder Jesse Bullen was a little flattered.

That morning Jesse had had his first letter from Amos.

"Dear lad," it ran, "I am getting on pretty well, looking about me, and I hope learning something. I am visiting some model farms, and noticing all I can. It may be of use at the old place, as well as in a farm of my own if I get one. Love to mother,

and tell her I'm faring well.—Your affectionate brother, AMOS.

“*P.S.*—If any of the old folks, or any one at the Rectory, should ask after me, pass it on. If she should say anything, lad, about my leaving so sudden or that—tell me. I'd take it very kindly if you'd drop me a line soon.”

Jesse sat down immediately, and wrote as follows:—

“Dear Amos, according to your wish, I write at once. Not that I have much to tell you from Haslington, where as you know news is scarce. I don't know that any one in particular has asked after you. I have seen the Parson and Mistress Judith once or twice. They said nothing about your leaving, or that. I spent the evening two nights since at the Rectory. All there and elsewhere goes on as usual. At your convenience, let me know your reason for not sheaving the barley as well as the other crops; and also inquire about the best reaping machines, as I intend employing one for the future. Love from mother, and believe me, your affectionate brother,

J. BULLEN.”

Jesse had just closed this letter when the Parson came in. He put it in his pocket that he might post it before evening. And then he walked off to the Rectory.

After lunch he essayed to leave. But the Parson had not done with him. He had been writing far and near for information about the examination. He had heard of a tutor who would undertake to pass Jesse (from the Parson's account of him) after six weeks of cramming. They talked for a long while in the study, and then the Parson said he had a letter to write ; and he ushered Jesse out of the study, bidding him to stay for tea. What could Jesse do, turned out of the study, but cross the hall to the drawing-room, where Judith sat at a table by the window frowning over a long bill ?

Jesse very soon settled the bill, made out the items, and asked if there was anything else he could do. And Judith was very glad to have company, she had been rather lonely these last few days.

"You see Amos was always in and out," she said, breaking through her reserve when she had warmed into a talk with Jesse over her knitting. "And as I've no other friend, I miss him. Don't you miss him, Jesse?"

"Yes, oh yes," said Jesse, "but you see I'm used to doing without him."

- "Have you heard from him yet?" asked Judith, after a pause.

"Yes, I had a line this morning. He's in London ;

he says he's getting on first-rate and enjoying himself; seeing model farms, and all manner of things."

After a moment Judith said, "I wish you'd say good-bye for me when you write to him. Say father and I were at Paxton, and we're both sorry not to have seen him."

"You did not see him then?" asked Jesse startled.

Judith looked up, full of surprise. Amos then had not then even thought it worth while to mention that he had not found her at home. Doubtless it had made no impression on him. Of course he had left no message.

Jesse seemed to divine her thoughts. He said, with a jerk—

"He left no message or anything that I know of. I thought you had seen him, of course."

Judith silently knitted. When she spoke again it was not of Amos. She had been pained to the heart; and now she felt both pained and angry. But Jesse should not see it—what, if he should write and tell Amos that she cared whether he said good-bye or not?

So she talked and talked, and the lamps were brought in, and the bright colour had come again into her cheeks. And the Parson still wrote in his study, and they two sat on in the little drawing-room, face

to face. Jesse in a low arm chair, turned his hat in his hands, and tried to read Mistress Judith's face. He read the beauty of it; but the great eyes that were bent upon the twinkling needles were hidden from him mostly. What might those eyes be hiding? thought Jesse, and was ill at ease. The beauty was a great deal; it riveted his eyes to the pure oval of her face. But the oval could not tell him what he wanted to know. He did not yet know that he wanted it, or he would have taken up his hat and gone. But he did want to know all the same whether Mistress Judith loved Amos.

He thought of it as she sat at the tea-table, eating very little, and knitting behind the urn. Why did she not eat? what had taken her appetite from her?

He thought of it as he sat in the arm-chair in the shadow after tea, and saw her sitting too in the shadow, always knitting. Why did she sit in the shadow? was there anything in her face she *could* not show?

He thought of it as in the long pauses, while the Parson dozed, and the needles clicked, and Bully whined in his sleep upon the hearth-rug, he cast up in his mind the women he had seen, and found them wanting. He cast up the fairest, wisest, purest women he had seen, and found them wanting. By

the side of this Mistress Judith he found them all wanting.

He thought of it as he rose at ten o'clock, feeling he must go ; and he thought of it as he went out into the darkness.

He thought of it as he came to the village Post-Office, and felt for his letter in his pocket.

"If she should say anything about my leaving so sudden or that, lad—tell me," said a voice in the ear of Jesse Bullen. It had a true, manly, trusting ring, that voice.

"I wish you'd say good-bye for me, when you write to him—say father and I were both sorry not to have seen him," said another voice. It had a very sweet tone that voice, with a touch of sadness in it. So sweet and so sad, that Jesse Bullen was irresolute no longer. He dropped the letter into the box, and walked quickly home.

CHAPTER XXI.

“THE GLOAMING OF THE YEAR.”

GLEANNING days were over, and the harvest was stored, and Christmas had come before Gentleman Bullen had left Trotter's End.

He had the “horkey” for his men before he left, in the great barn attached to the farm. They drank beer, and ate beef and mutton to their hearts' content, as their fathers and their fathers' fathers had done before them. And they drank the health of a Bullen, as their forefathers had done too, for many and many a generation back. And they thought as they looked at the handsome young master at the head of the table, and grew warm over their good cheer, that the old race had not declined anyhow, for where could finer young men be seen than him and his brother Amos, all the world over?

Next day, when the cheer was over, and they felt none the better for it on the whole—good food once a year is a dangerous experiment—they talked more of Amos, and of how his hearty face was missing at

the feast. And there were doubts as to whether Gentleman Bullen cared for the farm, and the interests of it, as Amos had done. He had made some slips at the "horkey," which wise old heads could not forget. He had said he supposed there would be no ploughing till after the New Year; and did not every boy of eight years old know that a deal of the ground must be turned over so soon as the crops were up and left lying till next spring? So the old men shook their heads next day, and said, they believed he'd be a gentleman; he were that already—but he'd need some training to be a farmer.

They would have been scandalized, indeed, had they known that Jesse had neither wish nor intention of being a farmer in any sense of the word. It was not in his nature to be uncivil to labourers, especially his own—but he looked at their rough hands and their rough faces, and thanked Heaven he was going to be a soldier—an officer—and not a sunburnt son of the soil.

After "horkey" Christmas came with great strides. Bleak winds blew, snow fell, the ivy on the church chattered and shivered. Master Hurst sat over the fire and tried to keep his poor numbed knees warm, and counted his years, and found them over the allotted time, and shook his head when Judith

came to see him, and told her he did not think the Lord would forget him much longer now. And she sat in the chimney corner, as she used to do when she was a little child, and the shadows flitted and danced, and the flame shot up, and the red log settled : and she and Master Hurst talked much as they used to do, only now she saw no black things in the chimney, and no Ruth came to fetch her back to tea.

Master Hurst often talked about Amos. But then talk flagged ; Judith had not quite forgotten how Amos went away in harvest, and never said good-bye. She could not tell Master Hurst about it ; she would not have told any one for the world. And yet she thought of it often, brooded over it, resented it. Such an old friend as Amos—how could he behave so ?

She remembered it always at night upon her knees, when she folded her hands, and laid down her face upon them, and prayed God to forgive her her sins. " As I forgive others," said Judith—" as I forgive others." And then lay down with tears in the innocent eyes, and found a little trouble in her life for the first time ; and thought sometimes, because she knew no better, that it was a great trouble. And it *is* a great trouble to older,

wiser folks than Judith when friends seem to prove untrue.

A week before Christmas it was settled that Jesse was to begin work with his "crammer" the first days of the New Year. The crammer lived in London, and to London Jesse must go.

Judith thought it was a very dull Christmas: Amos gone, and Jesse going, and Ruth with no temper to speak of by reason of chilblains. She did not feel any heart in decorating the church, as she had done last year with Amos; and she never sent up for holly to Trotter's End.

One of the men noticed this, and spoke his mind to Gentleman Bullen, who was looking at a young tree, with a thought of transplanting it.

"Mistress Judith, she'll be after them berries surely—leastways two years come Christmas she were arter them."

"What did she do?" asked Jesse carelessly, poking the bark of the holly with his stick.

"Stick holly and green stuff in them holes, ye see—pit boughs and sich all along o' the pews. Oh, very noice it du look to be sure, when's all set up loike and set out. Nobody never noticed the church, not afore her. And we loikes to see 'un set out loike, come Christmas. Maister Amos,

he were t' one to give her a hand wi' the job, he were."

That afternoon, three days before Christmas, Jesse sauntered leisurely down to the Rectory in the afternoon. He had got over his scruples about going there a good deal, and went and came as he liked. He generally had some business with the Parson to be sure; but it ended in a chat with Mistress Judith in the drawing-room or the study. It was too cold for sitting under the porch, as he had heard Amos had done. He often thought of that, as the withered trails of clematis touched against his hat as he passed under it; and he wished it was not too cold for sitting under the porch now.

"Are you going to decorate this year, Mistress Judith?" he asked casually, after he had been a little time at the Rectory, sitting opposite to Judith, who was on a low stool by the fire looking out a sermon for her father out of the bundle.

"No, I've no mind to, this year—there's no one here can help me. And it's such hard work doing it alone. If I get Mr. Cocks, he spoils it all. Jacklin is going to put some holly up, I think."

"It seems a pity if it has been done hitherto," said Jesse, flicking a half-dead fly off his trouser—"to give it up without good cause."

Mistress Judith was not used to be so spoken to, for there was something tart in Jesse's manner. She looked up, pursing her lips a little, and her face tinged with colour.

"It has *not* been done hitherto. I did it the last two years—Amos and I. And I'll do it again may be, when Amos comes," she added, speaking warmly, for her spirit was roused. She would have spoken just so to Amos, if he had provoked her. She was used to the greatest possible deference from every one but Ruth: more especially was she used to it from the two Bullens. The decoration or non-decoration of the church, she felt, was quite a matter for her to decide.

"Mistress Judith objects to decorating the church," said Jesse, as the Parson entered—"on the ground that my brother is not here."

"On the ground I have no one to help me as Amos did," said Judith, turning over the sermons very quickly.

"And why should my lad not help you?" asked the Parson, putting his hand on Jesse's shoulder.

"He's going to be a soldier—he wants to keep his hands nice. He won't care to finger holly," said Judith, smiling in spite of herself at her own pettishness.

Jesse, who saw that she was not in an amenable frame of mind, dropped the subject, and talked to the Parson. But his eyes followed Mistress Judith about the room, as she slipped the sermon into its faded velvet case, and took up her knitting. He did not stay very late that night ; and when he left he felt he could not say that he had enjoyed himself. As he walked up the village, his trouble grew upon him : he began to feel tormented, wretched. He did not sleep soundly that night : it was the first time his sleep had been broken since he teethed. And he awoke next morning, feeling things were not going rightly with him. Things had always gone rightly before, and Jesse did not approve of the least halt in Fortune's wheel.

That morning, as he walked about with his hands in his pockets, and stood frowning at the pigs by way of overlooking the work of the farm, a great many disagreeable remembrances flitted across his mind.

Gentlemanly—Jesse adjusted his hat—talented, the eldest son—Jesse looked back at the long brick house with the creepers on it—was it possible that after all a woman such as Mistress Judith should not like him ? was it possible she could like Amos, the younger, the farmer, the dunce ?

Disagreeable tales of true love, that knows no let or hindrance, that tramples brains, looks, manners under foot, and chooses its own ideal, came to his remembrance. But, said Jesse, after all it was on none of his separate talents or attributes that he should stake his success—if he were trying to win a woman, said Jesse, in mental parenthesis. It was the aggregate, himself, him, Jesse Bullen, who must have a better chance than most men; he felt he *ought* to have a pretty wife, with a good dower: and he thought all the world must feel the same.

Then Mistress Judith's words and high colour came back to him. "I'll do it again when Amos comes back, may be."

And then his thoughts travelled back to the days when they were children, and he was favoured by the Parson, a rare rising lad who could learn anything. And Mistress Judith, in a white sun-bonnet, pouted her lips at him, and would not play. Jesse had a very retentive memory for other things than lessons. He remembered distinctly a little figure lost in an agony of grief between Bully's ears.

"O father, father! I *don't* want that boy! I don't want that boy to play with me!"

It seemed to Jesse, in spite of himself, that

Mistress Judith had grown up loving Amos, preferring Amos, and shunning him.

Next day Abraham and Jephtha were hewing branches of holly off the best trees at Trotter's End, and rolling it down in a hand-cart to the Rectory. Judith looked out of her window, and coloured angrily.

But there was Jesse himself, apologizing and deferential, and withal manly. He was so sorry for what he had said,—he hoped Mistress Judith would forgive his interference. He owned he had spoken hastily, and it had troubled him ever since. Might he have the holly brought in, to be used or not, as Mistress Judith wished?

And Mistress Judith, looking up at his handsome young face, and seeing a real look of distress and humility there, settled to decorate the church to-morrow with his help, and forgave him.

CHAPTER XXII.

PARSON INGREY'S PROMISE.

SO Jesse Bullen, lifting his hat, and settling it again with a sense of relief, walked homewards. And as he went, he met Parson Ingrey.

"Lad," said the Parson, "where have you been?"

"Went to take some holly to Mistress Judith, sir," said Jesse, smiling.

The Parson smiled back.

"Have you tamed the shrew then?" he asked.

"Mistress Judith wishes now to decorate the church to-morrow, sir," replied Jesse, in a lower tone.

"Ah—so you have got your way with her, lad. You have made even a wilful woman to give up her way. You need not fear the examination after that, eh?"

"Well, I hope not, sir; but I cannot be confident. Cleverer men than I have failed."

Humility in Jesse Bullen was very becoming: it made a sort of sudden change from a proud major to a tender minor that came in with great effect.

But a sudden change came over the Parson at the same moment.

"*Failed*, Jesse Bullen!" he exclaimed—"name no such word to me. Remember, lad, you disappointed me once: I had destined you for better things than you are aiming at now. You gave up that, lad, and it cut me to the heart. Don't talk of failure *now*."

Jesse had never seen the Parson so excited. There was a long silence as they paced side by side. When they came to the cross-roads below Trotter's End, the Parson stopped and laid his hand, in the old fashion, on Jesse's shoulder.

"Lad," said he solemnly, "I have no son of my own. May be it's well; since God has ordered it so, it must be well. I've looked upon you, lad, almost as my own—you know that. And I tell you now, lad," and Parson Ingrey turned his face away for an instant; he was a very reserved man, and he seldom spoke so plainly—"there's nothing I will deny you; nothing that's in my power and keeping, if you will be a credit to your mother, to your name, to yourself, and to me. Lad, do you understand me?"

Jesse coloured, and in a low voice he said quickly, "I understand, sir,—I hope I don't understand too

much. God help me, I can't help——" And then he checked himself, and was silent.

Reserved Parson Ingrey liked him all the better for that.

"You cannot understand too much," said he. "Prove yourself worthy, keep yourself straight, lad. It's a good rule to be sure of success and fearful of falling. Sure of winning what's good, lad,—fearful of being overcome of evil."

Again there was silence, and then the Parson asked—

"Will you come back with me, lad, and spend the evening snugly?"

Jesse Bullen looked at the cross-roads. There was the way to Trotter's End straight before him. There was the smooth broad way to the Rectory straight behind him. It was four o'clock now, and the light was fast waning; from the Rectory gables through the trees the merry lights twinkled. At Trotter's End there were no lights as yet; Mistress Bullen was fond of sitting in the gloaming.

The outline of his mother's worn cheek in the silent dim room—Mistress Judith's fresh oval face by the fireside in the bright lamp-light, bent over her knitting, but sometimes raised to him. Jesse Bullen

weighed the two pictures in his mind an instant as they stood in the twilight at the cross-roads.

Was there nothing more momentous than the choosing of a picture?

Then it is wonder that Jesse Bullen stands irresolute. There can be no doubt which is the fairest, nor which his soul loves the best.

He feels there is something more. He struggles with himself, he opens his mouth to speak, he draws his arm even from the Parson's hold.

But upon his lips the words die, and he says instead—

“Thank you, sir,—you are very kind.”

And the Parson and his lad pace back along the smooth broad road to the Rectory.

But as they go, something moves in the hedge and Jesse starts. It was only a blackbird going to roost. He fancies he hears an echo to his steps; but it is but an empty echo. He looks out into the darkness if perchance a tall man's figure may come to meet him or face him in the way. But Jesse lifts his hat and shakes back his locks, and the cold evening air of Christmas time makes him feel better.

“He's had his day,” said Jesse unconsciously to himself, as the porch and the clematis come into

sight, and he is crunching upon the gravel path, and the gate has swung and clicked-to behind them. "He's had his day, and now it's mine. I mean no harm to the chap, that I don't."

And the light streamed out on to Mistress Judith's little myrtle in the border, and within her voice was sounding musical and soft.

"What is the child singing, eh?" said the Parson, opening the door.

Jesse did not answer; he was listening to the words of the Christmas carol Mistress Judith was singing. She was going to and fro, and the sounds ebbed and flowed, ebbed and flowed. But Jesse could hear—as a shadow crossed behind the blind—the refrain that followed on each verse—

"This brings gladness, this brings gladness,
To you and all mankind."

And in spite of himself Jesse smiled as he laid his hat on the hall-table.

That evening was like many other evenings that had passed before. Nothing beyond bright fires and lamp-light, and the click of knitting needles and Bully's whining dreams, and the nodding of the Parson's head in his arm-chair. If Jesse had had time to think of it he would have wondered at himself. What would he have thought of this in

Paris, of long evenings with a sleepy country parson and his daughter ? He would have said it was impossible that he should come to such a pass.

But Jesse Bullen did not care to think of Paris : looking at Mistress Judith's face he could not choose but wish that that time could be forgotten ; that as easily as the web on her needles was run out when a stitch had seemed amiss, so that passage in his past, and may-be other passages, should go into nothingness. And now as he sat watching her it was no time to think of where else he might be, or of how he had come to choose her company night after night. He was carried along on the wings of one thought, the thought of her ; he had lost all consciousness save the one consciousness, of her presence.

On this night, two before Christmas, they were a very silent party. Sleep had overtaken the Parson, and the paper had slid from his relaxed hand and his knee to the floor. It had fallen on Bully ; and Bully had shaken himself, walked out from under it, and settled himself in another corner.

And Jesse sat leaning forward in the low arm-chair, leaning forward and looking at Mistress Judith. And she, with a bright colour in her cheeks, tried to look as if she did not feel the eyes upon her, and

could not do it. And the needles flew under the lamp-light. That was all.

At ten o'clock Jesse Bullen sighed involuntarily, and said good-night. He had not made a remark of any note all the evening; he who had so much to tell, and could tell so well, was dumb now.

Mistress Judith said to herself that Jesse puzzled her, that she could not understand him. Yet it seemed to her after he had left the room, and was putting on his greatcoat in the hall (sent down to him by his mother), that every movement had its meaning. The sound of his foot moving on the oak floor, the rattle of the sticks in the stand as he chose out his own,—they seemed to mean something to Mistress Judith, they seemed to be speaking to her all the more for Jesse's dumbness. She put her hands up to her hot cheeks when he was gone, and did not know whether she were sorry or glad when the door closed and the crunch-crunching on the gravel ceased, and Ruth drew the great bolts and stumped to bed, and Jesse was gone.

He was gone, and Paxton Dick knew it.

"Good evening, sir!"

Jesse started.

"What are you doing here?" he asked sharply.

"On my way to bed, sir, so it please you. The

same way as yours, sir, part of the way, and no offence. I was considering of how that same door opened like it did now some months back, and a figure as like as could be to yours, sir, comes out—only no one didn't draw the bolts, sir, because the servant were out, and so as it chanced were the Parson. But he didn't come out not alone, sir, like you, he didn't. Out she come along of him, and it was time o' the Feast, sir,—says she, 'Take me to the dancing-booth, Amos, do!' And off they went. It was getting dark; but my wares took me along that way, and I comes on them standing hand in hand, sir, leastways he had hold on her, he had, and were looking her close in the face. And when I comes by, they thinks better of it. He drops her hand sharp, and they turn back. But they weren't not quite sharp enough for Paxton Dick, not they, though it's likely the dancing-booth didn't see them till an hour or two later, when I was safe away. Beg your pardon for telling you my foolish old tales, sir,—you don't want to sell no fresh eggs, sir, do you?"

"Hold your tongue and keep your eggs to yourself," said Jesse; "I'm perished with cold and don't mean to stay talking."

"Not likely, sir," said Paxton Dick sneezing—

“not likely, sir.” And was left tramping by himself in the dark.

Jesse Bullen, with great strides, spanned the road to Trotter's End. In the old elm beside the bridge a melancholy owl was hooting. He was surprised to see the light streaming out on to the gravel and the garden, and the door standing open.

A few steps nearer and he saw his mother, a dark figure framed in by the light. Nearer still, and he could see her hands over her eyes as she peered out into the dark, and then he saw some of her soft hair floating in the chill wind.

“Mother! here, in the cold?”

“Ay, lad, lad,—we're going to have a blithe Christmas! I couldn't forbear coming to tell you. Amos is coming for a week, and he's to be here on Christmas Day! Your head doesn't ache, does it, dear son?” she asked tenderly.

“No, of course, it doesn't. So Amos is coming, is he?”

CHAPTER XXIII.

AMOS IS COMING.

IT was not a thought likely to pass from Jesse's mind, and, as he dressed in the morning and shaved his firm cheek, it rang changes continually.

"So Amos is coming, is he?" An hour later he was at the Rectory, waiting for Mistress Judith to come and decorate the church. And an hour after that they were decorating.

Jesse, as nimble as a squirrel, was up and down in an instant, fastening a garland at the top of a pillar, tying knots like a woman, and ropes like a man. Mistress Judith, in a labyrinth of holly, held the steps below, and looked up. This was better help than Amos's. Amos was very willing to be sure, but then he was rather clumsy; he went slowly up and down the steps, and made a sound between his teeth as if he were grooming horses when he came to a difficulty. Especially in the tying of knots Amos might be considered a failure.

"I think we might follow out a plan I saw in a church in France last Christmas, Mistress Judith, if you approve it." And they were following this plan now.

"Where did you go to church in Paris?" asked Mistress Judith.

"Oh—to different churches," said Jesse, hesitating a little.

"I wonder where Amos goes to church now—I wonder where he'll go on Christmas Day, don't you?"

Jesse had his mouth full of string and could not answer.

They went in to dinner together, and after dinner they went back to the church. By half-past three it was almost too dark to go on with their work. Mistress Judith shivered.

"Are you cold?" asked Jesse, with a solicitation in his voice that frightened Mistress Judith.

"Yes, rather: let us go out."

He followed her silently, they walked round the garden a few times and watched the red lurid ball of the sun going down behind the poplars; and then Ruth began drawing down the blinds, and the long evening had begun.

Parson Ingrey had gone to Cambridge. He would not be back till seven o'clock.

"He telled me to say as he wish for to see you, sir—and you warn't to go away, not till he come," said Ruth, bolting the windows and upsetting two chairs all at once.

"Oh!—and, Jesse," said Judith, "father left this letter for you to read—I quite forgot—I'm as bad as father every bit. I think it's from your crammer."

Jesse read, and as he read his countenance fell and fell.

Ruth had gone, shutting the door behind her. Judith was poking up the fire to light the room.

"Mistress Judith," said Jesse, "do you know what's in this letter?"

"How should I?" said she, trying to laugh, but feeling frightened by his strange manner and the stride he had taken.

Jesse sat down in the low arm-chair and put his hand over his forehead.

"I must go to-morrow—that is all," he said.

And that *was* all: for Mistress Judith said nothing.

There was a quarter of an hour that seemed an hour to Jesse, of perfect silence.

Judith stood at the window looking out into the dark, and wishing her father would come home

from Cambridge. She was afraid even to tap with her soft little forefinger on the frosted pane, in case the sound might remind Jesse Bullen of her presence. She had a sort of heaviness at her heart thinking he was going, that she should have neither him nor Amos any longer. And an indefinable dread too at the thought of his being in the room alone with her at that moment. Why should she fear, she who was so unused to conventionality, so used to being alone with Jesse or with Amos? She did not know, only she feared.

After five minutes had passed, it seemed to her that the silence vibrated. She stood looking out into the dark still, but no wheels sounded in the distance. There was only this strange, unnatural, awful silence between her and Jesse.

And after it had vibrated till she thought she could hear the silence pulsing like an overcharged heart, she thought she must look round just for an instant, and satisfy herself: Jesse might be reading a book, might be still reading the letter. She would look.

And she looked. And as she looked her heart beat louder than the silence. For, in the low arm-chair sat Jesse Bullen, with no book upon his knee. Upon the floor lay the letter which he had thrown from him, and as the firelight flickered up and fell

upon his face, she read there an expression so new to it, so different to the self-confident, cold smile of Jesse Bullen, that she asked herself whether it could be he. And seeing that there was no doubt it was he, she grew more frightened still.

With her small hand she gently took hold of the curtain, freed her foot silently from the folds on the floor, made quite sure where the door was, and then—moved. Mistress Judith was no coward, but she had prepared herself cunningly for flight. A very dignified flight of course—just to walk quickly across the room, ask Ruth for the lights by way of a pretext, and then to stay out of the room—for a little time, at all events.

In another instant Mistress Judith was a prisoner.

“Jesse—how dare you! let go my hand!” And her face was all aflame with fright and anger.

And Jesse stood looking at her; looking at her, and not letting go.

“You were going away,” he said hoarsely—“you were going away, and I shouldn’t see you again. You don’t care for what I suffer, do you? Oh, no!” And he laughed bitterly. “You don’t know what is the matter, do you? You pretend not—oh, yes! you pretend not. You don’t know that my life’s being eaten out of me bit by bit; and

that this uncertainty is killing me. Who were you thinking of, looking out into the dark there?—who were you thinking of?” And he unconsciously tightened his hold on her wrist till she gave a little cry of pain.

But she looked up at him with terror in her innocent grey eyes, and said firmly—

“Just then I was thinking of Amos and——”

Jesse’s laugh, that made Mistress Judith shudder, broke in at Amos’s name.

“Of him, yes, of him ! and I—I’m nowhere, not to be thought of, cared for, spoken to—only your slave, your servant, your tool. I am going to-morrow, but what is that to you ?—nothing, nothing !”

And here Jesse sank down in the low arm-chair, covering his face with his hands, and rocking himself to and fro.

Poor little Mistress Judith stood fixed on the hearth-rug, afraid either to go or stay, but less afraid now, because her hands were free. Her wrists pained her still, and the pain stung her into speaking.

“Jesse Bullen, you’ve hurt me very much—you have been very rude to me. Amos would never——”

But the words died ; for Jesse, tall and calm,

with a white agitated face, stood up before her.

"Judith," he said, "will you talk to me a moment? will you hear what I've got to say? Don't be frightened, my dear—please, don't be frightened." And he passed his hand over his damp forehead, and she saw by the firelight that an infinite tenderness had come into his eyes instead of anger. She found her hand held softly in his, and she found herself facing him on the hearth-rug, when the flame kept shooting up and illumining his handsome face, and then falling, and leaving only his voice to speak for him.

"Don't be frightened or angry," he began; "it is I that ought to be frightened at myself, for I hardly know what I'm saying. Only you know, Mistress Judith, surely you know what I want to tell you. Will you give me any hope—any, any?" And she felt the hold tightening on her wrist again.

"Sit down please, Jesse," she said tremulously, "Give me a little minute to think—just a little minute."

So they sat down, opposite each other, the firelight hiding and revealing the faces of each, and on each its struggle. Mistress Judith

stared into the fire and held her hands tight together.

So this was love, was it? She had often wondered what love would be like. Now she knew: now she was a woman. And a woman must choose, must say "Yes" or "No." And that was what it had come to now.

She thought—and over her flushed face came a deeper colour at the thought—how long ago, four long months ago, she had looked at something in Amos's face, and asked whether this could be love come to her at last? And now she knew that never had been love—*never*. Amos had gone away, given her up, forgotten the old friendship, sent no message—no regret—nothing. And Mistress Judith looked at Jesse, with the dark lines under his wistful eyes, and saw how he was waiting, waiting. And she said this was love—there was no mistaking this.

"Judith," said Jesse at last, with a sort of calm despair in his voice, for he had misinterpreted her long, long silence—"will you tell me one thing? I will try to bear it like a man, only tell me—do you love—Amos?"

Judith's eyes kindled as they turned from the firelight upon Jesse. Love Amos, who had for-

saken her? love where her love was not prized? and confess it?—never!

So with a torrent of indignation she denied it.

“Amos and I were friends—we never loved each other—never.”

Jesse came across the rug and sat down on a chair beside her.

“Mistress Judith,” said he, “if you think you ever can, if you think there is any hope you ever will—just give me your hand will you?”

Five minutes afterwards, a small warm hand wavered for a moment on Mistress Judith's knee: then lifted itself, and passed into the big hand of Jesse Bullen.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A CHRISTMAS SECRET.

MISTRESS JUDITH'S dreams were broken next morning by the carol singers underneath her window. She opened her eyes and wondered where she was ; and the old old words she knew from childhood came ringing out lustily in the clear morning air.

“ Sweet, sweet, sweet, sweet
Christ, Thou didst Thyself debase
Thus to descend to human race,
And leave Thy Father's throne above.”

There was a weight at her heart for an instant, just one instant. And then she remembered that she was betrothed, that she had given her promise to Jesse Bullen.

Upon that, leal Mistress Judith was very troubled at the one instant of heaviness with which she had awoke. Heavy at heart and betrothed ? heavy at heart and beloved ? It ought not to be, it could not be, said Mistress Judith.

Now she set herself to find a good cause for the heaviness and soon found it. A great page had been turned over in her life, and she had not told her father. Not that it was to be a secret from him, God forbid ! But he had come home before she and Jesse had had time to talk of how they were to tell him ; and Jesse had said only hurriedly, "Say nothing to-night, my darling,—not till I have spoken to you." And when Judith—troubled and almost guilty at the idea of having to sleep upon a secret, and such a secret!—had looked at him with an appeal in her eyes, Jesse had gone out to the door to meet her father.

"Perhaps he is telling him," said Judith, while her heart beat high and fast as they stood a moment talking in the lobby ; and when they came in, she felt proud, thinking how they were her own, her very own, these two, and how very handsome was Jesse.

But they were talking of very common matters, not at all of love or marriage.

"It is a different Christmas from the last for me," said Jesse ; and Judith looked up half hoping he was going to tell now. But he went on.

"I was at Madrid you know." And then he told what they had done at Madrid, he and the friend he travelled with.

Judith looked at her tall betrothed, and wondered how he could talk so lightly, seeing all that had passed since last he saw her father. But he had some good reason no doubt for keeping silence till to-morrow ; and till then she must be patient and only plan what they should say. Should they go in together ? would it be before breakfast ? She hoped so. She wished her father had been ten minutes later that she and Jesse might have planned it all *to-night*, and told him all *to-night*.

But as that could not be, what could she do but keep silence ? She could not speak of other things with this great secret lying at her heart. And when Jesse forced her into conversation about some trifling matter, and she had to answer whether she would or no, she felt as if she were lying—lying to her father. And then she fell again to silence, till Jesse rose to go.

By that time, what with his long cold drive and the hot room and the hot wine and water (that by the way, for the first time since Judith had waited and watched for him, he had to order for himself), the Parson had begun to nod in his arm-chair.

Jesse beckoned to Judith to leave the room with him. She shook her head doubtfully ; but he beckoned again, and she went.

And in the hall, under the swinging lamp, she looked appealingly at him once more.

"Mayn't I tell to-night, Jesse?"

"No, no, you little foolish one," he said smiling, pulling on his greatcoat and buttoning it. "I must talk it over with you before that. It has been a very little time ours, darling—I hardly know it myself yet—you don't want all the world to know it, do you already?"

"Oh no, Jesse!" she said, looking lovingly at him—"only father, because you know——"

"Go back to father now, my darling," he answered, "and I will see you again to-morrow. Good-night, my Judith, my own!"

And he put his warm large hands round her upturned face, as he stooped and kissed her softly.

She shrank back a little and pushed him away gently.

"O Jesse—not again—not yet!"

"Not yet! and you've promised to be my wife!" he said.

"O yes, but Jesse—not till father knows—please, I'd rather not, Jesse."

And Jesse, answering only by an amused smile, kissed his hand playfully as he turned and opened the door and passed into the darkness.

Mistress Judith stood, hesitating a moment, looking up at the swinging lamp, and the cold blast Jesse had let in whirling round her. Then she looked into the drawing-room, where the fire had settled down low and red, and her father was nodding in the chair beside it.

She went softly to the mantelpiece and lit a candle. Then as softly, almost timidly, she went up behind him and kissed his forehead.

“Going to bed, Judith?” he asked, rousing himself. “Are you tired, eh—tired?”

“Yes, a little, father,” said Judith; and could not for the life of her dissimulate more boldly. And so, because she might not tell him of her secret, and because she could not carry it before him as if it were not, she ran up to bed. And then dreams came, and after dreams came carols. “And now,” said Mistress Judith—“now is the time for telling father!”

She could not rest even while she dressed herself, but must be always looking up the road for Jesse. Of course Jesse would be as eager to tell as she was; he had only put it off last night that he might settle how they should say it. And now it would be a real Christmas box for father. Perhaps Jesse had put it off just for that! Just

that the good news and the "gladness" might come on Christmas Day.

She was disappointed when breakfast time came, and with it no Jesse. She would rather not have had another meal with her father without telling him. She could not eat much, but kept reading the paper, and then getting up nervously and going to the window.

After breakfast came church bells. There would be no time now for Jesse to talk to the Parson if he came. Mistress Judith begun to be heavy-hearted. She did not want to say her prayers again without telling her father.

Yet it must be so. The bells stopped; and Jacklin came running to fetch the Parson. And the Parson came out, getting into his surplice as he went along, and Judith had to follow always with the secret.

"Well, only for an hour longer," she said; "Jesse will tell him after church." And then her heart warmed to Jesse, her lover, her betrothed; and her heart beat, thinking how she should see him by Mistress Bullen in the pew across the aisle.

And so she went in, forgetting to look at the wreaths of holly on the pillars, forgetting the texts her hands had painted about peace and

good-will to all mankind. Because there was something new and great to think about this Christmas. Had not the Saviour given *her* a Christmas gift? Was she not a woman now, and loved by Jesse Bullen?

Just because she was a woman, and because she was loved, she durst not have looked up at Mistress Bullen's pew till half way through the first prayer. And then she could not see, for, kneeling, the great pew rose all round her. And so it fell that the *Venite* was begun before her eyes looked up from under their white lids and travelled across the way to rest on Jesse Bullen.

But they fell short of Jesse; for there, with his great eyes fixed upon her, and his lips parted on the "Come, let us sing unto the Lord!" stood Amos. But his lips closed as his eyes met the eyes of Mistress Judith.

Did he read anything there that silenced him?

It was Jesse that took up the strain, at least, and sang—

"Let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation!"

Mistress Judith stopped singing too. And Mr. Cocks from behind the barrel-organ looked up, missing her voice, and wondered.

CHAPTER XXV.

ST. VALENTINE'S DAY.

MISTRESS JUDITH lay silent one cold February morning and watched the soft feathery snow-flakes drifting across her lattice-window.

It was nine o'clock—time to be up and doing: but Mistress Judith was never an early riser in winter. The pillow was very soft and warm, Bully lay stretched across her feet, and it was cold work getting up only to see snow-flakes and bare branches instead of linnets and roses.

Winter always seemed to her a mistake in nature, a something to be tolerated but never to be approved. It was in vain that the Parson reasoned with her that the earth wanted rest, and pointed to her own love of late lying in bed as an illustration. She would say the comparison was not good, and shake her head, and say she did not like the winter.

No winter had ever as yet seemed longer or colder to her than this one. She had lost her

old glad spirits, and the fair oval of her face had lost something of its symmetry. The grey eyes had a wistful troubled look in them at times; and she did not go quite so often to Master Hurst.

Mistress Judith was crossing the threshold, looking into life. Peering out now to see the better, averting her face now in fear and trouble, the grim figure of Disenchantment loomed out before her.

Not that she had been disappointed wholly by Jesse, or Amos, or any other.

But Amos *had* failed in his friendship. Had he not come again at Christmas to Trotter's End? Had she not seen him that Sunday in the pew across the aisle, and had he not come and stayed two days and left again, and never been to see her?—never, that is, with any wish to see her. Had he not rather chosen a time when she was out to come to the Rectory. “And he *did* know I was out,” said Mistress Judith to herself—“for didn't Jesse see me ten minutes before on my way to Paxton with father?—and of course Jesse told Amos that, when he joined him down the road. Jesse never forgets like father.”

She held to Jesse firmly, and said to herself that he would never have deceived her so. She said to

herself again and yet again how blessed she was in being loved by such as he. And she said to herself—it was all to herself now, there was too much “saying to herself”—that it was not Jesse’s love that troubled her, oh, no! but the secret, the Christmas secret that had lengthened itself out into February days, and was a secret still.

Jesse left Trotter’s End the day after Christmas. On Christmas Day itself he said a hurried farewell to Mistress Judith at the garden gate. Mistress Bullen stood talking to the Parson a few yards off. Amos had crossed the road, and was speaking to Mistress Hurst, who was pinning up her bonnet-strings, and had just been telling her husband about the “consekences of sin.”

“Not again, Jesse?” said Judith, looking up pale and anxious into her lover’s face—“not see you again before you go?”

“I shall have business with Amos you see to-morrow, dear heart,” he answered. “He’s offered to undertake some work for me, and I must talk it over. If I come here again your father will want me to talk over the examination. And I’m tired of that Judith, my darling, I want to think of you instead.”

“But, Jesse,” said Judith quickly—“about telling

father? you have not told him yet, Jesse, and it makes me so uneasy till he knows. Oh, Jesse! you can come in for half a minute can't you, Jesse?" And in her eagerness she laid her hand on his arm.

"Judith! look out!" he said, in a sharp whisper. And for the first time Judith saw Jesse frown.

She withdrew her hand quickly, as if she had been caught in some unmaidenly act. But into her grey eyes there came a look of something like proud displeasure, and Jesse saw it.

"Dear love," said he, putting himself between her and the Parson, and taking the hand he had almost pushed away, tenderly in his own—"I am only sharp, because my heart is heavy at going away and leaving you. You won't be angry with me, Judith? You won't think I spoke untrue when I said I loved you?"

"I never thought that," said she quietly, looking down. "But, if we are to be married by and by, it seems hard I cannot lay my hand on yours, Jesse, and——"

"Oh, darling, my darling—you misunderstand me!" he said hotly, pressing the hand he held between his own. "It's only for what folks will say—only for that—and——"

Judith's upturned eyes met his and stopped him.

"If you are ashamed, Jesse, I am not," she said gravely. "And if Paxton Dick and all the world were here I would tell them plain, 'I am going to be Jesse Bullen's wife.' And why can't we tell *father*, Jesse?"

Just then Amos turned from Master Hurst's door and came across the road. Jesse was too quick for him, and before his eyes had sought out Mistress Judith, she was standing some way from his elder brother, and no pang of jealousy shot into Amos's heart. Dumb he was, very dumb. After he had greeted her and patted Bully there seemed nothing left to say. And just before they left the Rectory, when he would fain have asked her if she would be at home to-morrow, for he had but one day at Trotter's End, he looked round and saw Jesse close beside him: and then the words refused to come. Not before mortal ear would he say anything of any meaning to Mistress Judith. Amos was far too proud and shy for that.

Next day Mistress Judith received a note. It ran as follows:—

"I will write to you, for I cannot come to-day. I would have asked you to meet me, but I knew you would not do it unknown to your

father. When you get this I shall have gone. God's blessing be with you and preserve you for your devoted J. B.

"P.S.—Say nothing till you hear."

To Judith's surprise the bearer of this letter was Paxton Dick. He brought it in his basket of eggs to the back door, and asked to see the young lady. And Ruth laughed while Judith coloured. Should she take the letter? Could she show it to her father? Anything was better than that it should remain with Paxton Dick.

When she read it she knew she could not show it to her father. Her heart was sick and heavy as she turned the key of her mother's great desk and laid the crumpled note among the mint and lavender with a sovereign that was all her own. For the first time she looked at that desk with a guilty feeling. When she went to her room at night, the feeling of guilt rose and swelled: she could not sleep with that desk staring at her. So she carried it into the next room, a bare room, and then came back, praying to God that Jesse might soon write his second letter, and tell the secret that was losing all its sweetness by being kept.

"It's not like the mint and lavender," she said

sadly, shaking her head before the glass as she combed her hair—"it's not like the mint and lavender—they get the sweeter for being locked away. Oh, Jesse, Jesse! when will you be able to tell father?"

And on this cold February morning it was the same old story: "When will he tell father—when?"

And still Jesse's answer came back across her mind: "Don't ask me till after the examination is over, dear love of mine. I dare not tell your father till that is over. If he were angry it would unman me: I could not pass—we should both be undone. Wait till the middle of February—it's but a short time now. And then I'll come and tell him. You think a secret's wrong, my darling; but it does not grow more wrong by being kept a day or an hour or a week longer. It will be all right when we've once told him; and you may trust me I am doing what I judge is best for you, for him, and for me.

"Whatever you do," the letter ended, "don't let any one know by any word or sign. Especially be careful about my mother and all at Trotter's End. We must tell our parents first, it is but our duty. And if Amos comes, just be careful, very careful. Don't throw yourself in his way: never be

alone with him. If he asked you questions it might be very awkward. You would not like to tell a lie, and yet you could not tell the truth. It is only for a little while, my darling—till then may God bless you."

This second letter came before the New Year. Between that time and the snowy morning when Mistress Judith lay awake and thought of all that had passed she had had many struggles and much perplexity.

Jesse was right, true, good, honourable, and she loved him. Secrets from her father did not seem right: yet Jesse told her to keep a secret. Judith could not understand.

"What is truth?" said Pilate long ago. Mistress Judith, with her innocent wistful eyes, looked out now and again into the great shadowy unknown world of realities and unrealities and asked it too.

And there was no one to answer, no one to make reply. Only the snow drifted silently, large and fleecy, across the lattice, and the song of shivering children at the garden gate told her it was Valentine's Day.

"Good morning, Valentine !

Curl your locks as I do mine—

Two before, and two behind,—

Good morning, Valentine !"

“Will there be any valentine for me?” said Mistress Judith—“will the paper come and tell us Jesse has passed, and will Jesse come and tell father?”

And still only the snow-flakes made reply.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WAITING FOR TIDINGS.

THAT it was to be “in the middle of February” was all that Judith knew about the examination. Ask her father she could not. Untutored in deceit or dissimulation in its least degree, she could not bring herself to talk of Jesse, over whose name the shadow of the secret hung.

“How can I?” said Judith, “how can I? he was my friend only, and now he is my dear love—how can I talk of him to father?”

Valentine’s day brought no news with it. No wonder, for Jesse’s trial only began two days later, and there was an interval that seemed an age to three people in quiet Haslington village, before they could expect the news of woe or weal to come.

For Judith soon learnt from her father, to whom she listened with face averted, the probable time they must sit like patiences upon monuments. She often indeed carried out the old saying literally: for despite the cold she was often driven by her

trouble out of doors ; and rather than sit in Master Hurst's ingle as of old, she would wander about listlessly in the churchyard, out of sight of the study windows, and when she was weary of standing she would rest on the stone over her mother's grave.

"If you were here, mother," said Mistress Judith in those days, leaning over the deaf grave with a yearning tenderness, "there would be no secret lying at my heart. I should be a better girl, mother, and I'd have said 'No' to Jesse when he bade me never tell till he came home. But it can't be wrong, mother, can it, since Jesse says so? Oh, I don't know now what is right and what is wrong!"

There seemed no refuge now, not even Master Hurst's. For next to that of her father, Mistress Judith felt the old man's presence most discomfiting. The secret ought first to be told to her father, and then to Master Hurst. She had never hidden things from him before : he had known all her troubles since she was a child. And now something hindered her—a voice saying constantly—"Don't go to Master Hurst's just yet—not yet—not for a little."

And once when she had gone, thinking the old man would be grieved at her long absence, after

a few feeble tender reproaches he had done his best, unwittingly, to drive his visitor away. For he spoke of the sons of Mistress Bullen, and of what folk said ; and he gave the palm to Amos—Amos of the stalwart frame, the russet hair, the great frank eyes ; “ him as was good and stout, him as was loiked of all the people—him as was niver heady nor high-minded loike, didn’t niver give hisself no airs.” At which Mistress Judith rose up, saying she must needs be going home.

But the long interval passed away, and the day came when the news might really be looked for. The Parson had a messenger in Cambridge ready to bring out the morning’s paper, the evening’s paper, any paper that would bring the list of names to Haslington Rectory in an hour after its delivery in the town. He had had a messenger there for two days, four posts, by the way—but that was not known to any one but the messenger and the Parson.

How Mistress Bullen and he should know simultaneously was the question. Serious thoughts had the Parson of hanging about the cross-roads, and being the bearer of the tidings the rest of the way to Trotter’s End. But Mistress Bullen settled it by saying she would come to the Rectory,

if the Parson permitted it—it was some hundred yards nearer Cambridge than her own house.

And so before breakfast she was there, white and calm and cheerful.

Ten o'clock brought the postman: and then they knew there was no news for them that morning. If there had been news, the messenger was to bring it, much quicker than the postman. Mistress Bullen said she would go away, and come back after dinner. It would help to pass the time, she said; and Judith never pressed her to remain.

For the next hour or two they felt better: a reprieve was something, though good news would have been so much better.

But one o'clock drew on. And at three the messenger might be looked for.

Mistress Judith began to be sick with anxiety. And upstairs in her own room, sometimes on her knees by the window, sometimes with her Bible open on the sill—but always by the window—she spent the long hours till two struck from the church steeple, and Ruth downstairs clattered the cracked bell.

If it was an anxious time for the Parson and Mistress Bullen, what was it to Judith? To them

it would be disappointment, very bitter if the list came and no name of Jesse Bullen in it. But for Judith—what might it not mean? What would Jesse do in *that* case about the secret? Would he tell, tell as a penitent, and ask forgiveness of her father? Ah! if he would. But of this Jesse had said never a word to Judith. And, in spite of herself, she had come to know Jesse was not so wholly brave as she could wish: not so brave as she would be, who feared nothing but doing wrong.

Before half-past two, calm Mistress Bullen was at the Rectory again. Once more the Parson dragged out the big arm-chair for her. Once more Judith, restless and uneasy, began flitting nervously to and fro, to and fro. The Parson, absent as he was, marked this well, and smiled a little just about his lips. He was uneasy too; the “Republic” had no charms for him to-day. He cut a new book, and when that was done,—why it was done: and there was nothing left to do, but to sit opposite to Mistress Bullen and tell himself he had no doubts about Jesse.

“I counted on the lad being with us to hear the news,” said he absently. “But I suppose he had some good reason for staying in London for a

bit. It does a man like him good to see the world."

Mistress Bullen, who had no opinion of the world, was silent on that point. But presently she said quietly in her silvery voice—

"I think he had no mind to come till he heard the news—Jesse is not so brave as Amos in ways like these."

But luckily the Parson did not hear. He was dreaming. He disliked allusions to Amos when Jesse was the one object of interest to him.

The smile played round his lips again, and he drew down his bushy brows to counteract it. He thought he knew why Jesse did not come till he was sure,—that wise, sly Parson! He did not mean to come till he knew whether he could dare to ask for Mistress Judith. "Good lad, good lad!" said the Parson: and "good lad" meant a world from him.

"Did you take any dinner, Mistress Bullen?" asked Judith, stopping in one of her flittings.

"Not much, dear heart, not much—but I shall eat when the news has come and I'm at rest." She was too delicate to say "when *we* are at rest." But she took Judith's hand into her own,

and caressed it, while her eyes looked troubled, almost sorrowful.

"Tea," said the Parson—"she'll have a cup of tea—eh? You'll have a nice cup of tea?"

And he rose and rang the bell.

"Well, I should like it," said Mistress Bullen, who had been fasting all day, like a foolish woman, and whose head began to feel light and dizzy.

Mistress Judith, waiting to see the tea safely ordered, took her last flitting, and settled herself on the window-seat upstairs. There she would stay till horses' hoofs rang up the road. And over and over she mistook the beating of her own loud heart for the hoofs of that horse that was to bring news, great news to Haslington.

"I think I hear something," said Mistress Bullen for the fifth time. But it was only Ruth bringing in the cup of tea. Ruth's footsteps were not altogether unlike the tramp of horses' hoofs. She set the tray upon the table.

But it was not the echo of the sounds she had awoke that made the Parson leap up at last and go to the window.

Clatter, clatter, a scramble upon the gravel where it had been pulled up suddenly—there stood a

horse with smoking flanks at the Rectory gate. And there stood a man with a newspaper in his hand, at the door, under the porch.

Jesse Bullen was a lucky man surely. Upstairs in the window, downstairs by the fire, sat two women praying for him ; two women, pure and true, and withal who loved him, hanging upon the news of his success or ill success as if it were a matter of life and death. It was very nearly that to Judith in her window upstairs, who had only smiled through life before, and now knew that she was living because she suffered.

Back came the Parson, unfolding the paper slowly. Down came Mistress Judith and stood with lips open in the doorway. Mistress Bullen, grown paler, sat up in the arm-chair and leaned forward.

"All right!" said the Parson, "he's through! Fourth on the list, Mistress Bullen. May God bless him!"

And there was the name sure enough, not to be mistaken. Jesse Bullen, fourth on the list, within a thousand marks of the man who had passed first.

"I wonder he is not here already," said the Parson, as soon as they could speak. "He would hear it early in London."

“He’ll be here to-day,” said Mistress Bullen, calm as ever, but drying up a stray tear here and there. And Judith said to herself that she hoped so, with all her heart. But she doubted—just a little. Why?—she did not know why. But she could not be sure he would come to-day.

After this Parson Ingrey, with legs stretched out to the fire, and the smile come back about his lips, drank off the cup of tea, enjoyed it, and was happy. In all his life he had never tasted a better cup.

Poor Mistress Bullen looked on, thirsty and tired, and thought she could have enjoyed it too.

But what *did* it matter? And who could be expected to have good manners or good memories to-day? Least of all the Parson.

CHAPTER XXVII.

GENTLEMAN BULLEN COMES HOME.

A HAWKER'S cart was drawn up at Master Hurst's door two days after the "news" had come to Haslington.

"Buttons, Mistress? 'ymn-books, soap, tops, ile, string, nails—what can I give you? best kality, and as much of 'em as you loikes—shan't not be round again not for three weeks—going into Bedfordshire oi be——"

Young Mistress Gadd, who lived behind one of the houses, and was afraid of being overlooked by the hawker, had joined Mistress Hurst, carrying her baby, who had got into short frocks, and was kicking.

Mistress Hurst bought a hymn-book and buttons, a sauce-pan and a pen'orth of salt. Young Mistress Gadd bought a shiny gingerbread man, which was clawed immediately by her lusty offspring, who would bite anything, from his mother's finger to the coral made by his father out of a lobster's claw, which hung round his neck.

After they had closed their bargains the hawker was quite glad to furnish himself in exchange with a little gossip to carry on to the next village.

"The young maister he be coomin' home 'bout this time, I take it?" he inquired.

"The Parson have gone to meet him—see'd 'im go by an hour ago, I did."

"In 's own four-wheeler?" asked Mrs. Gadd, holding one end of the gingerbread man, while the baby with both hands clutched the other, and sucked.

"Ay, ay—it's not loike he'd take a strange kerridge—and there bean't none nearer than Paxton."

"It's set up as Gen'leman Bullen 'll be, what with 'e Parson giving him his edication—larnin' him be a gen'leman, and sich."

"If folks speaks true," said Mistress Pratt, cleaning a spoon with her apron, "he'll need his larnin' and his manners—not that he hadn't got 'em more than half-way afore. His father, he were a gentleman, not stuck up nor heady-loike."

"Will he bide here?" asked Mistress Gadd—"or will he go right away with the army, do ye think?"

"Parson 'll git th' army to come here, loikely,"

said Mistress Pratt, who was an authority. "He won't be for Master Jesse to go away, not he. And he can't not give up 's perfession and that, ye see."

"Souldiers woan't do the place no good then," said Mistress Gadd.

At which the hawker laughed good-naturedly, told them they need not fear the soldiers, and drove off.

That day was a marked day in Haslington. Folk remembered it well: because there came the Parson driving through the village, bringing home Jesse in his own four-wheeler. Great was the disappointment when it was discovered by many heads poked out of many windows that no coloured uniform flashed out of the carriage. But then Gentleman Bullen wore a greatcoat: and there was no saying but the uniform might be under that.

Ah, it was a day of mark in Haslington, and no wonder. But Mistress Gadd's baby kicked and cared nothing for Gentleman Bullen: had he not got something much better?—a real gingerbread man. So it was a day of mark for him too.

Parson Ingrey drew up the horse at his own gate and prepared to get down.

"I suppose I can see her alone?" said Jesse nervously.

The Parson took the hint at once.

"Alone! why yes, lad, and God speed you. Here! give me the rug again. I'll drive up and fetch your mother."

"And you won't mention anything to my mother at present, please, sir?" said Jesse.

"No, no—get off with you—and God speed you." And then the Parson drove off.

Judith, with eyes wide open and pale cheeks, had been watching from the window-seat up-stairs. She had been very glad when she heard that her father was going to drive to meet Jesse. What a chance it would be for Jesse to tell! But she could not help her heart failing her at times. Jesse had put off and put off: he seemed so to fear this telling. And if he had not told it, why it would be worse than ever to tell. And Judith had made up her mind that if her lover should still persist in delay, she would be firm, take things into her own hands and tell her father. This secrecy was more than she could bear: she said to herself she would not sleep again with the dull weight of it upon her.

But when she saw the carriage stop, and Jesse

coming alone across the garden, she felt sure that he had told. Why else should he come alone, and by the Parson's leave, in face of all the village? But still Mistress Judith's heart fluttered while it leapt. Would her father be very angry, that she had so long hid it from him? She looked at his face as he drew the rug over his knees, and there was no grave look there (and a grave look was all the Parson's frown). Then she blessed God that all was well, sped down the stairs, and in another instant found herself folded in Jesse's arms.

"My darling, my darling!" said Jesse.

"Oh, Jesse, Jesse!" said Judith, and laid her face against his shoulder and cried. He had told—he was her darling. Her father was not angry—there was nothing now to fear. "Thank God," said she to herself—"thank God!" And that sufficed them for some time to come.

Ten minutes afterwards, when she had taken off his coat, and smoothed back his hair, she sat down on the sofa beside him.

"Look at me, Jesse—you've hardly looked in my face yet. Don't put your eyes down—I want to see them—I'd almost forgot the colour, Jesse. Oh, I thought you'd never come. We thought you'd come directly after the examination—and

then we thought you'd come as soon as ever you heard the news. But I suppose you liked stopping in London, because you heard it a few hours sooner—didn't you, Jesse? But then what had you got to do these two days since?"

"I don't know which question to answer first, Judith," said he, "you take my breath away. How pale you are looking, darling, my darling—what has made you lose your colour—eh?"

"I've been very unhappy and very happy," said Judith, lifting her wistful eyes to his, as she fingered the button on his coat—"since you went away, Jesse."

Jesse coloured, and began hastily, "What? Amos hasn't——" but checked himself, and Judith went on, not noticing—

"I never had any secrets before, Jesse—never—and it fretted me so. Then I wanted to write to you, and I couldn't without telling father. But oh, it's all right now—all right!" And she pressed her forehead against his hand, and swayed herself to and fro in a blissful silence for a moment. Then, suddenly, "He wasn't angry, Jesse? was he? Father wasn't angry I hadn't told him before?"

"I think I hear the carriage," said Jesse, jumping up, and going to the window. "No, it's the barrow in the yard."

And Judith followed him, and slipped her hand into his arm.

“He wasn’t angry, was he, Jesse?”

“Angry, why should he be angry?”

“He could not be angry at your loving me,” said she gently—“I know that.”

“Oh, Jesse—how happy I am!” she said presently; “how happy you’ve made me!—now that you’ve told father there seems nothing sad in the world. I thought it was very sad sometimes lately—while you were away, you know, Jesse. Just fancy his not being angry with me for never having told him all this time—and he tells me everything, you know. We never had any secrets before,—father and I. Come and sit down, Jesse—I want just to tell you something. I hope you won’t mind—but do you know I could hardly believe it would be all right, and that you’d have told Father before I saw you? I could not help being afraid it would still have to be done, and I’m such a coward, Jesse. I hate cowards—I’d as lief be a murderer as a coward! That’s why I’m always trying to be more brave and not to feel frightened about things: but I can’t always help it—and you’ll have to teach me. We’ll help each other, won’t we, Jesse?” added truthful Mistress Judith, remem-

bering her lover had not always seemed to her quite as brave as she should like.

"There they are!" she cried presently. "Does your mother know, Jesse—eh?"

"No," said Jesse, poking the fire with his back turned to the door. "She doesn't know. And take it quietly, darling, if you can—your father——"

But Judith was in her father's arms at the door, not listening even to Jesse.

"So it's all right, Judith?" said the Parson, "You've made Jesse happy to-day—eh?"

Judith, bewildered, made no answer. But a few moments later, quieted and very pale, she slunk back into the drawing-room, and took her knitting.

Wistfully she looked at Jesse, full of talk, with his handsome face a little flushed, and his eyes sparkling, while he sat beside his mother and held her hand.

He had not told the whole truth then after all. Not the whole truth. And this was Mistress Judith's lover.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MID-HEAVEN.

JESSE BULLEN won golden opinions in Haslington. He was so kind to his mother, so thoughtful to the Parson, and no one could say he gave himself "airs."

It was soon generally known that Mistress Judith and he were betrothed; and though some folks said they had liefer it were Master Amos, the general opinion was that they were a well-matched pair.

Mistress Bullen could not long be kept in ignorance. Any one with half her discrimination could not have failed to guess it from the moment when Jesse stopped short at the Rectory instead of making first for Trotter's End. How she took it when her son confirmed her suspicions was known to none: for Jesse never expatiated on the subject. Only a light was very late in Mistress Bullen's window that night, which might have been seen all up the Paxton road, twinkling merrily. Lights tell no secrets: they

don't burn any dimmer for trouble, or brighter for joy. And all that Judith knew was that next day she was clasped in Mistress Bullen's arms, and called her "daughter."

"I'd rather it were not spoken of," said Jesse that night to his mother. "I'd rather you did not write about it, you know, mother, and set folks talking just at present. Master Ingrey does not wish the marriage to be till I've got settled somewhere with my regiment."

Mistress Bullen sat silent, scraping a paper match she had just made. Presently she said—

"Jesse, lad—I suppose there's no objection to telling your brother Amos?"

"Why, yes—I think there is," said Jesse decidedly. "At present I should prefer that no one should know of Judith's and my engagement. I feel sure it would be the Parson's wish as well as mine. At all events it is *my* wish," added he yet more decidedly, and Jesse was seldom decided.

After which Mistress Bullen sighed softly, kissed her son, and went away into her own room. She had meant to write to Amos: there was the little brown ink-bottle and the open blotting-book all ready on the table.

And yet, woman and mother as she was, she could

not help a feeling of relief for the moment when she was forbidden to write. How could she have told Amos? that was a question that had weighed heavily upon her for two or three hours past. Nay, it had weighed on her a long time back, ever since the days when Jesse went early to the Rectory, and came back late, and sat very silent and distracted through the winter evenings. Then was it hard not to remember how Amos, her Benjamin, had gone early and come late; and how into his honest eyes a new light would rise and flood now and again as he sat beside her, over the settling fire, silent too, and distracted? Ah, he had been first, said Mistress Bullen to herself: and she tried to remember the day when Amos had begun to care for Mistress Judith, and could not. She never could remember the first dawn of that sun that flooded Amos's eyes—only she knew it rose and rose; and she feared, ah, how greatly! it must be rising now: soon it would be in mid-heaven, in mid-heaven! And then—ah, it was all over for her Amos now! Jesse had come in—Jesse who won all things and all hearts—and had snatched the prize away. And she must tell Amos.

That was what had troubled Mistress Bullen. And when she felt almost glad that for the present the task was taken from her, she called herself a coward.

He must be told 'some time, before long ; it was only putting off the evil day.

"Out of sight, out of mind," says the old saying. It seemed true in those days as regarded Amos. At least his name had dropped wonderfully out of common talk at the Rectory and at Trotter's End. And since he was seen no longer, the village folk too ceased to speak so much about him. Gentleman Bullen on the spot, a hero, and Mistress Judith's lover, was food enough for talk. Folks just knew Master Amos was learning new ways of farming and such like, and looking out for a bit of farm of his own. And if that were the case, of course their interest in him must wane a little. "New ways and such" were well enough likely for foreign parts, and may be Master Amos would find some strange place to suit himself. But as for Haslington folks they wanted no changes. "'Chines and new fangles hadn't done no good as they knew of."

It was easy to see why, in his own family and at the Rectory, Amos's name slipped out of common conversation. The Parson had never cared for him, never noticed him. Judith held her peace, because she had no happy thoughts now with regard to Amos. She felt it very much that he had never sent word or message to her, since the news must have reached

him of her engagement to Jesse. A thrill of pain passed through her often when she thought of old days, old happinesses that she and Amos had had together; before he got estranged and cold, before the idea of foreign parts had disturbed his quiet mind and changed him so sadly. Jesse studiously avoided any reference to his brother; gladly would he at times have effaced all recollection of his existence from his mind. As for Mistress Bullen, her heart was far too sore for her Benjamin to allow of her speaking of him as if all were well.

So Amos's name grew strange and rare, and of the four who closed their lips upon it Mistress Judith was the one most keenly conscious of the fact. To her it was a new thing to put an old friend into banishment; and spite of her displeasure at his neglect, she could not shut pain out altogether. Often when Jesse had left her, with the warmth of his kiss still on her cheek, she sighed, thinking of poor Amos whom none remembered. And then she would start up, knowing she should be gay—for was not she betrothed to a fine, brave, and worthy lover?

They had only fallen out once, she and Jesse, and it was but a lover's quarrel that led back to the renewing of love. At least so thought Judith, telling herself

what was wrong for her might not be wrong for Jesse; and that in this she must be guided by him, till she could convince him that she was right. That she should tell her father how for two months she had been Jesse's betrothed before ever they asked his leave was Mistress Judith's wish. It was not Jesse's wish. He was a good sophist, if not a good reasoner: he managed to puzzle his little lady-love and won the day.

"You can tell him, Judith, if you think it will raise his opinion of me," was an argument that silenced Judith. She felt sure that neither carelessly nor lightly would her father hear anything that in the very least degree could throw the shadow of a shadow upon his opinion of his "lad." Parson Ingrey's clear soul was in his eyes; and Mistress Judith knew that soul well by the image of it he had transmitted to her.

In Jesse's presence it was easy enough to shake off any qualms of conscience. Who could be wrong with a clear face and brow like Jesse's? And who can be wrong in the eyes of a pure first-love? So Mistress Judith put away that little difference from her, and began newly: and she found that Jesse felt alike with her in many many things, while only in one had they disagreed.

New Year and Plough Monday had passed drearily: Plough Monday, when all the plough-boys in a ring cracked their great whips round the Rectory and the Bullens' farm, and shouted rough songs, lost in the louder voice of the stinging cracking. Judith and Ruth had flung them half-pence; little boys, with paper flowers and ribbons in their caps, went round the village with a cobbled bag between them, and up the street in triumph swept a plough drawn by great hairy-footed horses, and decorated gaily with flags and flowers and wreaths. But Judith was alone then.

Now March and part of April passed, and Judith had her lover. There was only a rumour, nothing more, that a commission might be forthcoming in early May.

Days came now that were very sweet for lovers, when Jesse Bullen would come early to the Rectory, and Mistress Judith and he would go a-primrosing in Primrose-Spinney.

With spring and the return of flowers, and Jesse's presence, the old beauty had all returned. Cheeks that had grown pale and thin were round now, and flushed with a beautiful delicate colour, as of an apple-blossom with the first May-bloom upon it. Beauty comes early, and beauty stays late; but the beauty

of seventeen summers stands alone. Eyes looking forward into love and womanhood, feet tarrying still in the paths of childhood. Just such was Mistress Judith that bright spring-time.

One day, more beautiful than all the others, marked itself especially in the memories of the young lovers.

Never had Judith looked fairer, never was the basket higher filled with primroses, never did the sweet faint fresh smell of them rise into their faces fraught with more associations of all that made life beautiful and sweet.

“It seems somehow as if we were at the gates of Heaven, Jesse,” said Judith reverently.

Jesse, watching an approaching figure in the distance, made answer doubtfully—

“I hope we have further still to go, darling, before the end comes.”

“You speak as if we should be turned back from the gate,” said Judith; “I did not think of that, Jesse.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

PRIMROSE-SPINNEY.

THE figure, bent under the weight of a large basket, that came towards them at a fast lobb'e, was that of Paxton Dick.

Contemplating the road or his own dusty boots as usual, the only thing to be seen of him, from which Jesse anxiously tried to read, was the crown of his grey and greasy slouched hat. But as he drew near, cutting across the grass to meet them, he began to look up, and shoulder the basket a little higher. This shouldering meant a good deal to those who knew Paxton Dick. Something accomplished, or something to be accomplished—that was the signal for both.

“That horrid man,” said Judith, nervously—“don’t speak to him, Jesse, please!”

But Jesse, with a long stride, had gone to meet the hawker, who, after fumbling in his pocket, produced a letter, and gave it to him.

Jesse must have transferred the letter very quickly

to his own, for by the time Judith reached him it had disappeared. Paxton Dick was speaking in a mumbling low voice; but, to the girl's surprise, it was Jesse who looked round with a vexed expression when he saw her, and it was he who drew Paxton Dick aside for an instant, while Judith went slowly on. She was half-divided whether to go or stay: Jesse's look of impatience had driven her away; but would she not have done right to stay beside him? That man could do no good to Jesse—none.

It was not three minutes before Jesse joined her. To take up the conversation just where they had dropped it would have suited him best; but, whether in reality or only to his fancy, that seemed to lead directly or indirectly to Paxton Dick. Jesse, who was not too imaginative, looked back to Judith's words and his own answer, and thought there was something ominous in both.

"It seems somehow as if we were at the gates of Heaven, Jesse," said she. "I hope we have further still to go, darling, before the end comes," said he.

That was what Jesse remembered, and tried now to put aside and to forget.

Failing to find anything to say, hard as he tried, Judith made use of the opportunity.

"I wonder you speak to that bad man, Jesse," she

said—"Father thinks very ill of him, and so do other folk."

"And pray why?" he asked sharply.

"Because he's neither good nor true," said Judith; "and being with untrue folk can never do us anything but harm. Paxton Dick's a deceiver like Judas; and I think we honest folk should keep clear of him as best we may."

"You have a good opinion of yourself," said Jesse smiling, but not easily or without an effort.

"Good opinion, Jesse?" she answered, startled, and colouring, as she looked up at him. "Oh, I hope not; I didn't mean that, Jesse—I was thinking of you and father when I said it, though I said 'us.' You know I can't well be otherwise than honest, Jesse, never having been with any one that wasn't clear as day. I daresay if I were tempted—by such folk as Paxton Dick, now—I might be led away and become untrue. That's why I don't like to come near him, nor for you to come near him. I don't think he could hurt *you*, Jesse," she added quickly, as if she had been disloyal to him, and must make amends—"except in so far as he meddled with your concerns. I'd never give him money to pay a bill in Cambridge, Jesse, if I were you, or anything like that."

Jesse's loud merry laugh grated on Judith's ear.

"Bills!—Cambridge! what do you know about Cambridge, eh? You're extremely wise, Judith, of a sudden."

"Don't speak so," she answered, pained. "I did not mean to teach you, Jesse, who know so much more than I do. I need not be afraid you'll get into mischief at Haslington when you've been all over the world, where there are many more bad folks than here; and where you never got into any harm, or anything."

"How do you know that?" asked Jesse in a changed voice, speaking low.

"By my own heart," she answered firmly, looking up into the blue sky with far-off eyes. "I'd as lief distrust the sun in heaven, Jesse, as you."

Jesse Bullen stopped short. He opened his lips to speak. Where was his angel then? where was his good angel, that there was no time for him to speak, before Judith went on, still looking dreamily before her?

"And if I thought you'd done anything wrong or mean, Jesse, why it would break my heart, that's all."

And then the lips of Jesse Bullen closed. The good angel had been nowhere, nowhere. It was some moments before Judith spoke again.

"Do you think folks know when other folk pray for them, Jesse? If they pray very hard, entreating very much of God—what do you think, Jesse?"

"I don't know," he said, obliged to answer something. "If *you* pray, God must hear."

"Of course God hears. He's heard me always when I prayed for you."

"You do pray for me, then?" he said earnestly, looking at her innocent face. "You do pray, Judith?"

"Yes, Jesse, of course I pray. I prayed for you when you were in Paris sometimes; because it was such a bad place, I heard them say. Theatres, and bad weights and measures, and such like, aren't there, Jesse? And actors and actresses are bad folk, aren't they?—they've got quarrels and jealousies among themselves, who is the best actor and that, haven't they? And I daresay other bad things I don't know about."

And she looked up at Jesse, who had tasted of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and had chosen the good, with an almost adoration in her eyes.

And he turned his face away, and watched the cows browsing in the meadow beyond the path which they were treading, that was skirting now the boundary of the wood.

"Shall I carry the basket?" he said presently.

"Yes—only very gently. Don't spill any. Because I've got a great china bowl to fill. May I always have flowers in our sitting-room, Jesse,—always?"

He looked at her an instant almost sternly. Then stopping, and laying hold of her arm, he said passionately—

"O Judith, nothing shall come between us, shall it?—nothing, nothing?"

"No, Jesse, nothing, unless God comes between. But He does that sometimes, Jesse: He steps in sometimes between lovers, as I have heard folk say." And into her large calm eyes the tears had welled suddenly.

"But you, you——" he said, throwing up his head in an agony, and then folding his arms tightly about her, while the top primroses tilted from the basket about their feet, and lay scattered all before them. "You will never forsake me, whatever happens, Judith, my love, my darling—say that you never will say 'No, Jesse, never!'"

"Let me loose first, dear heart," she answered. "Let me say it freely, and looking up to God. Here give me your hand, Jesse, my true love. Now I can say it—Whatever happens, I will never forsake you, Jesse—neither in this world nor the world to come."

"The world to come!" he said quickly. "You can't answer for that, my darling ; if you'll promise it for this world it is enough for me."

"But not for me," she answered solemnly. "We must be together in Heaven if we are to be happy together on earth."

"And suppose Heaven has no place for me? You'll have to go in all alone, my darling, and leave me behind," he said, smiling sadly, as he stooped and picked up three or four of the fallen primroses from the ground.

"Leave you behind! it's not very likely, Jesse. If there were no place for you, I'd drive you in upon my prayers."

When they reached the Rectory gate, Jesse looked at his watch, and made over the basket to Judith.

"You won't come in?" she asked wistfully.

"No: it is getting late, dear love."

"Late? and it's not two o'clock yet!—You could stay to dinner, Jesse? or"—and her face fell—"it's the post you want to get back for, is it? You could write a letter here—there is three-quarters of an hour before the time, you know."

"Oh, it's not the post particularly, or anything," he said hurriedly, boring a hole with his stick in

the rotten post of the little gate, "but I've business to do."

So he turned away, saying he would be back again at five o'clock.

Ten minutes later he was at his desk, writing a cheque, and enclosing it in a letter.

Later, he put it in his pocket, and taking his hat went out again, and down the village.

As he looked up into the blue sky above him, the same that had smiled down upon him in his morning walk with Judith, he saw how the sun had travelled down the side of Heaven. It had been in mid-heaven when they set out together, and now the glory of the day was done.

Would there ever be such a day for him again? asked Jesse: and doubted.

Mistress Judith, putting her primroses in the bowl, doubted not at all.

Never had Jesse seemed dearer to her than to-day.

And there was his step upon the garden-walk.

CHAPTER XXX.

SOMETHING FOR AMOS.

ABOUT this time even Parson Ingrey began to wonder that Amos did not come home. Such a home-bird as he had been, such a mainstay to his mother and to all affairs at Trotter's End, it did seem odd he should stay away for months within half a day's journey of Haslington.

No one but Mistress Bullen and her two sons knew the reason ; and she knew it only in part.

Amos had come home at Christmas, sanguine of the success of his new plan. He would take charge of Trotter's End free of charge, on condition that Jesse would let him have the farm of Cob's Valley, a mile distant. The lease was close upon running out ; in the end of May it would be at Jesse's disposal.

How could it be otherwise than a good bargain for Jesse ? A bailiff—and what bailiff would do as Amos had done by the farm ?—during Jesse's absence with his regiment, requiring no salary, no percentage on

the produce. A companion for Mistress Bullen, who so required it, and a master for Cob's Valley, who would make it answer as Trotter's End, under his rule, had done. Mistress Bullen longed for it unspeakably. To have Amos at Trotter's End, or to go with Amos to the cosy house on Cob's Valley, was the desire of her heart.

Yet in Jesse's eyes there were insuperable objections. The lease was not out quite yet ; the man who had worked the farm worked it well—he was willing to renew his lease, and it would never be fair to turn him out without good reason. Amos thought there *was* good reason ; but, proud and hurt at Jesse's ingratitude, he left home immediately, went back to the model farm and college where he was studying, and determined only to come home when he felt he could go to Parson Ingrey and claim his daughter.

“I wouldn't ask her to marry me at once,” said humble Amos to himself, “not till I'd got a home, and set things agoing. But I've capital enough to buy a bit of farm—and the more I can have my eyes about me now the better for her—if only she'll take me,” said poor Amos, “if only !”

“I can't hang about at home and do nothing,” he would say ; “even supposing I could make money by that. And I want money now, I do : it's dirty

stuff enough in one's pocket to spend alone ; but you can dare some things with money you couldn't dare without—that's certain." And then he thought how he could make a home beautiful for her, and how she would make any home beautiful. "If only she'll take me!" said poor Amos, "if only!" That was the refrain of every song.

He had hopes of a farm to be let in May. When the time came he meant to run down and look at it, and learn his fate. But he could not help hoping that before that time Jesse would have got his commission and gone away. He did not want to quarrel with his brother ; especially as high words between them would grieve his mother so. And he knew there would be high words if he were long with Jesse. Besides he was not wanted now at Trotter's End, where Jesse was master ; and Amos was too proud to go where he could have been spared.

Through the long spring day he worked away, sparing no time or trouble where anything new was to be gained. There was an object in his life that never for an instant faded out of sight. And so the long days went by, and folk wondered he did not come home. He sometimes wondered a little himself, when the longing to see the face of Mistress Judith seized him. But he had settled it was best

to keep away till May; and what Amos settled he kept to.

About the end of April, sooner than he had expected, for the Parson had been up to London more than once and left no stone unturned, Jesse got his commission. He had passed high on the list, and that too was in his favour. He must join immediately, and his quarters for the present would be Dublin.

This news, long as it had been expected, was a little bewildering. Jesse, with his natural shrinking from disagreeables, had been contented with leaving the difficulties it would bring to the day itself.

Now the day had come, and there stood all the difficulties and all the disagreeables facing him. Neither was there any time to consider—he must solve them at once.

Leaving Judith, even for a time, was bad enough. But now report said Amos was coming home. He was certain to come at some time or other during Jesse's absence. And Jesse had an instinct which told him that when Amos came it would be to tell his love to Judith. Then—what would Judith think? For Amos, in the bitterness of his disappointment, would never fail to tell her of his (Jesse's) breach of

trust. And Jesse trembled, thinking of what might be the consequence of that.

Mistress Judith had become necessary to his life. At all costs he must hold and keep her.

But it was a disagreeable alternative that of telling Amos of his infidelity, or suffering Amos to discover it to Judith a little later. Jesse looked very harassed those two days while he was making up his mind; and Judith thought it was all because he had to go away and leave her.

"Don't be down-hearted, dear love," she said; "it's only for a little while. You know I'll be true to you."

The third day, with the courage these last words lent him, he rushed to write to Amos. Paper does not blush, as the saying goes.

And then—there was no help for it, he must part with Mistress Judith, blue-eyed and tearful, at the Rectory gate.

"Give me a flower," said he, "to take away." And she gave him a bunch of blue hyacinths, grown limp in her warm hand.

"They're very faded, Jesse," she said sadly, but trying to look cheerful through her tears—"but they mean a great deal."

"Not that your love is fading, dear heart?" said Jesse, slipping them into his button-hole.

Judith stretched out her arms, and put them round his neck. It did not the least matter that Mistress Hurst was washing clothes in the window opposite.

“Say no more of things like that, Jesse, if you love me. I’ll never change whether we die or live. And we’ll soon meet, you know—and I’ll pray for you.”

“Yes,” said he sharply; in a low voice—“*pray!*—you don’t know how much need there is of it.”

And up came the Parson, laid his hand upon his lad’s shoulder, and said cheerfully—

“Fear nothing, lad—I’ll look after her. When your settled and that, and have seen what sort of place it is your going to, write to me.”

And both Judith and Jesse knew that he meant that before very long they should be married.

So one more kiss, and one more wring of the Parson’s hand, and Jesse was gone. And as he passed the post-office he posted his letter to Amos. He did not care how soon he left Haslington after that.

CHAPTER XXXI.

“THE LOVE-LIGHT IN HIS EYES.”

NEXT evening, as Mistress Bullen walked disconsolately up and down the garden at the Farm, knitting, looking at the roses, and thinking, she felt more down-hearted than even the loss of Jesse seemed to justify.

Her calm face was full of trouble, for she was following the letter that was speeding to Amos, the letter that would blight all his prospects and turn the sweetness of life into gall and bitterness.

After the fashion of good and tender-hearted souls, she asked herself again and again if she had done right? Ought she to have told Amos against Jesse's wish? Was she quite certain that Jesse to the last would have forbidden her to write? She could be sure of nothing but this—Amos loved Judith first, with a love too deep for any words; and Jesse had come in, loved her too—“as deeply?” asked Mistress Bullen—and had taken the prize away.

When she was tired of walking to and fro, and

more tired of her ceaseless self-questionings, she went round to the yard to look at her chickens.

And as she stood talking to Jephtha it seemed to her that suddenly she passed into dream-land. For there, with a bright fresh colour in his face, his russet hair tossed back, and his long legs striding across the yard, came Amos.

Mistress Bullen could say nothing. Her heart leapt at seeing him, and then fell. Did he know? Why had he come?

"Well, mother," he said, folding her in his great arms; "you don't seem half glad to see me. Did you guess it was I when you heard the wheels?"

"I never noticed them, dear son," said she, holding his hand and stroking it. "I had no one to look for."

"But, mother—I told you I was coming in May—and as to the day, why I found I could get off sooner, and so I came right away. The man is turning out of the farm I'm looking after a week sooner, and they'll be glad I should look at it at once. And I'm glad, too, before it's snapped up. Oh, how beautiful the old place is looking!" said he, lifting up his hat, pushing his hair back, and looking round at the farm-house, at the village below, at the Rectory gable.

He stood looking a moment. Mistress Bullen tried to draw him round the corner to the front of the house. He resisted for a little, still looking: and then followed her.

"Little mother," said he, and Mistress Bullen's heart began to beat faster, because his voice had changed. "Little mother—do you guess why I've come? Have I been too long telling you? but you've seen it before, haven't you? Tell me how she is, mother—is she looking well?—is she as beautiful as she was? Why don't you speak, mother? Well, I thought you'd have been a little surprised, but not so much as this. There's nothing amiss, is there? You love her, don't you? You see she's an angel, don't you, mother, as other folks do?"

"I didn't mean to frighten you." And he put his arm close round her and led her into the house. "I'll wait a minute before I say more, and you'll feel better. You were always one to get pale when we'd any good news to give you. Where's Jesse?" he said cheerfully, but changing the subject with an effort, and giving a sort of quick happy sigh.

"Jesse's gone, dear son," said Mistress Bullen calmly—"you didn't——"

But Amos stopped her.

"*Gone!* is he?" There was such marked exultation in his voice that he saw it himself, and hastened to atone for it.

"You know I thought to find him here still, though I got your letter yesterday saying he had got the commission at last. Do you know, mother—it's very stupid of course—but for the moment I couldn't help being glad?—there is the seed of the old feeling of jealousy still in me. I couldn't help thinking sometimes, when I got down-hearted and low and that, of how Jesse got all things he wanted, and how all folk grew to love him. And that would cut me up, mother, do you know, just as if it were really happening. But it's all well now, mother, isn't it? if only she'll——"

"Amos," said Mistress Bullen.

He looked at her, and his face too paled.

"Good God!" he said, "she's not ill, mother—not dead?"

"No, dear son; but I fear she's dead to you. She's promised herself away to another man Amos. Dear son—it's God's will—bear up if you can."

And Amos was bearing up, if perfect stillness is that. With white face fixed upon his mother, every atom of colour passed away, there he sat speechless.

And the big parlour clock ticked out through the silence, while mother and son sat on.

It was some moments before Amos stood up and walked to the window. There was another silence after that before he said, not looking round—

"Who is it, mother?"

Mistress Bullen not answering, he turned quickly enough, and sat down heavily beside her on the sofa.

"Well?" said he stolidly.

Still no answer. Mistress Bullen was praying.

"You'd better speak out," said Amos, throwing up his head, after his own fashion, and looking at the top of the bookcase before him. "It can matter very little who it is now. But Jesse might have told me if he couldn't prevent it—he might have told me some one was after her, just to break the blow a little. Jesse must have seen it, he's been here all the time."

He spoke so quietly, that Mistress Bullen, having prayed, took courage.

"He has written to tell you," she said—"he wrote the letter yesterday, and it missed you. He had some reason for not telling you before, and I couldn't do it without his leave."

"*His leave?* cried Amos;—"his leave? Whatever has he to do with her or me, or the man she's given her love to?"

"Hush, dear son—he's more to do than you think." Mistress Bullen laid her hand on Amos. "It's he that has won her for himself—Jesse's to marry Mistress Judith."

The old low room rattled as Amos sprung to his feet, flinging his mother's hand roughly from him.

"Where's Jesse?" he cried; "where is he—traitor, fiend!—false coward that he is——"

"Thank God, he is gone," said Mistress Bullen.

"Ay—gone! that's very likely. He wrote and then he went away? *Brave* man, *true* brother!—you've to be proud of him—you who bore him—wolf with a lamb's courage. Ah me!—O God!—*O God!*"

All that evening, swaying himself to and fro, to and fro on the sofa, sat Amos, his face covered with his hands. And Mistress Bullen sat beside him.

From fury to despair, from despair to fury; it was a hard time for gentle Mistress Bullen.

And the evening sun kept streaming in, and louder and louder piped the canary in the window. What cared sun or canary for broken hearts?

And there were two in that room well-nigh broken. For on Mistress Bullen a double grief had fallen. The wreck of Amos stared her in the face, while all the time his wild voice kept telling her that Jesse

had done it—Jesse had been false—Jesse was the Cain who had destroyed her Abel.

"O God! O God!" said Amos; poor Amos, who should have said rather, "O Sin! O Jesse!"

Suddenly he seized his hat and rushed out into the twilight. His mother's broken voice pursued him with a piteous entreaty to come back. But the sound died in the stillness, and she could hear his hard breathing as he rushed across the bridge. She could hear now that he had turned the corner and was making for the Rectory.

She grew more sick at heart as she thought of Mistress Judith and the vain anguish Amos was going to give her. The thought gave her strength, and she ran to the hedge at the bottom of the garden, where she knew she could make him hear.

"Amos, for God's sake, listen to me. She'll never change her vow to Jesse, having once given it—you'll only break her heart, and all for nothing—do you hear, lad?—do you hear?"

He had checked his stride a little, and she hoped he had heard her; but he only shook his head for answer, and strode on. Mistress Bullen, sighing, clasped her hands and went slowly back to the dark room in the Farm, and put the baize cover over the canary's cage.

Amos came nearer and nearer to the Rectory. He could see the light in the kitchen window. He could see that in the sitting-room windows there were as yet no lights. The sun had only just set, and there was the pale grey of a May twilight resting on the place. Perhaps she was gone : the house seemed so still and dark, except for Ruth's figure crossing the kitchen window now and then. Perhaps God had been merciful and taken her away just at this one wild moment, that Amos might not be suffered to destroy her peace. And then Amos's heart beat loudly as he stood beyond the hedge at the upper end of the garden, just where the margin of grass upon the roadside swept up into a velvety mound for the privet to grow upon. For there was a step in the hall—a light step—and then a figure stood in the doorway, under the clematis that he knew so well.

She looked round the garden : he could not see her face clearly, but he knew by the movement of her head that she was looking round. Amos stood looking at her motionless and dumb. Would those wild eyes not call her to him? would his anguish strike no chord in her, and draw her to him? Hide?—why should he hide?—let her see him, let her find him and know it all. He was waiting only for his

voice to come back to him that he might call her. He was waiting for the power of movement to leap this little hedge, and have her for his own. Jesse's time had been and was over. Jesse, the traitor, the untrue,—she could not love him when she knew it all.

Mistress Judith drew a letter from her pocket, and came out from under the clematis to read it in the light. Amos could hear her murmuring over it, could hear a low laugh of bliss, as she turned it over in her hands. She could hardly see it in the twilight, and she moved her head constantly, and the letter, to catch a ray.

Amos moved under the shadow of the elm that she might not see him. "*Hide?*" he still said to himself—"*hide?*"—but he moved under the shadow as he said it. Could he grieve her, could he break her idol and see her sad as he was? "O God!" he said, beneath his breath again—and this time it seemed God took it for a prayer and lent him courage.

Amos put his arm round the trunk of the elm to steady himself. He knew he wanted strength: he knew now that he loved her too well to grieve her: he knew she did not fret for him, that she loved and believed in Jesse. So he knew too that he was going to take a last look before turning away for ever.

He grasped the tree tighter as his eyes went out yearningly towards her, straining to see her face only once: once that must do for all the years to come.

He looked, and just then Judith put the letter to her lips and kissed it.

Amos's hold on the tree slackened. He bent his head, and turning round, went up the road slowly.

Next day all the folk wondered that Mistress Bullen was alone again, and Master Amos gone

CHAPTER XXXII.

SHADOWS.

SO if Mistress Judith's heart was to be broken, it would not be by Amos Bullen.

She troubled herself very little this time that he had been home and had not come to see her. She was used to his unkind thoughtless ways now; and then her mind was full of Jesse. Jesse who had gone to begin his new life—Jesse her lover, so soon to be her husband, who had gone first to see what sort of a place it was, and then would come back and take her away.

When she thought of leaving her father, her joy clouded a little. But the Parson spoke so cheerily of the separation, promised so often to come and see them, seemed as anxious as Judith herself that the marriage should not be delayed; so that all the future was rosy with gladness, and Mistress Judith went to and fro again in the summering garden, and to Master Hurst's, singing in her heart all the day long. This is a beautiful beautiful May, said Mistress

Judith, so what will next May be ? And she smiled to herself over the lilies of the valley she held in her hand, and thought how she wished lilies bloomed on till July and August ; for by that time she was safe to be walking across the churchyard to be married to Jesse, and she would wear a bunch of them in her hair.

Master Hurst had got reconciled to Jesse's having won the prize. At least he smiled over Judith's happy face, and left off speaking about Amos. And he watched for the mail-bag every afternoon, and shook his old head saucily when every two or three days the mail-bag stopped and Mistress Judith carried off a letter. Master Hurst was nearly fourscore years old, but he had life enough left in him to enjoy fair things yet. And the love of such a one as Mistress Judith seemed a very fair thing to Master Hurst. It cast its halo about Jesse Bullen ; so that the old man, leaning like Jacob upon his staff, named two names now in his daily prayers, and prayed God to make his blessed little lady happy.

Letters enough came for Mistress Judith. But not enough came to the Parson. At least one day in June he was on his way to Trotter's End, to ask Mistress Bullen if she had had late news of the lad, and if he had sent any message to him, the Parson.

"I don't understand it," said he, as he walked along musing—"it's not like Jesse to keep me waiting for an answer on business matters. Perhaps he's trying to make a larger settlement on her, poor lad, and there's no need for that. She'll do very well, very well—eh? And—ah, oh—how d'ye do, Mistress Mulberry, my dear? and how's the ba——"

He had just been going to ask the fatal question, but Mistress Mulberry, knowing what to fear, had passed by with a curtsy.

The Parson had a long talk with his lad's mother that day. And yet they came to no conclusion, satisfied each other not the least on the subject of Jesse. It seemed as if both were on their guard, both longing to know more, both fearing to show they feared anything.

And both feared, just a little, that things were not quite right with Jesse. The Parson because he could not get Jesse to say what sum should be settled on Judith: Mistress Bullen because twice she had had to forward letters to Dublin that she did not like the looks of. "Bills?" said Mistress Bullen sighing. It must be a large bill, since it was sent in twice the same week (that week in which Jesse had gone). And it was the same bill certainly, for Mistress Bullen did not see many

letters, and she remembered handwritings well. "Bills?" thought the Parson too, asking it of himself, but angry the next moment at the foul suggestion. Why should he doubt Jesse, his lad, on such slight grounds as these?

And so they parted, each saying to the other that all was well.

It was a few weeks later than this that Mistress Bullen, sitting in her chair by the window, was startled by the sight of two men in long black coats, townfolk evidently and no men of Haslington, leaning upon the bridge, and looking about them. Strangers never came to Trotter's End: and Mistress Bullen did not like the sight of them to-day. From that hour she was more certain than ever that all was not well. But she told no one, not even the Parson, of the two strangers, and she tried to account to herself for their appearance in many ways. But women alone and brooding build fabrics of fancy: and no arguing on the other side convinced her that there was not something going wrong with Jesse. Her faith in him had been shaken once: he had done that to Amos which it was not easy for a mother to forget.

When Mistress Bullen's fears tormented her greatly, she had a fashion of going to her desk, and looking

over her papers and accounts to see that the Farm was doing well. And that comforted her, for sure enough the Farm was paying.

There were Amos's accounts in his clear round handwriting, tied neatly with red tape, and labelled with dates and terms.

There were some loose scattered papers in Jesse's handwriting; and then came the accounts of the last two months since Jesse had gone. These were in Mistress Bullen's own handwriting, and as well kept as any clerk's. She had a very clear head, and could not be deceiving herself. All was doing well on the Farm. Then why did not Jesse settle the two thousand, as he intended, upon Mistress Judith, and let the wedding be? And what were those letters that looked like bills? And was Jesse still getting them at Dublin?

Jesse did not write very often to his mother now. She sighed over him, being his mother. And she would have sighed more had she seen him sometimes in his barrack-room, his face clouded with an anxiety that was to her a secret, and losing the first freshness of his manhood over mysterious troubles of which he alone could bear the burden.

Two months he had been a soldier, and the life was what he liked. Yet the core of sweetness had

been plucked out of it. He knew that he was a harassed man.

It did not comfort him when letters came from the Parson, begging him to make an effort to get the settlements made out, promising to his daughter a dower of one hundred pounds a year, with the sum of eight thousand to become hers at his death.

Jesse had promised to settle two thousand on his wife in the first days of his betrothal. Now he had but to put that promise in writing, and Mistress Judith would be his. Two thousand? It was nothing from Jesse Bullen's fortune. And yet he sat with tied hands at his table: the Parson's letter on one side, another letter on the other. Between them both a cheque-book.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

JESSE'S TROUBLES.

THE tone of the other letter seemed the most peremptory of the two. At least after a moment's consideration, Jesse drew the book towards him and wrote a cheque for the sum of fifty pounds.

How he loathed the name written there. How horridly familiar it had become to him of late. Of late? said Jesse, trying to think how long this nightmare had been upon him, and bowing his head upon his hands when he remembered that it dated barely four months back.

Four months, and four months, and four months—how many four months would go to make a lifetime? And yet there was something worse to fear than even this teasing nightmare. Fifty pounds once in the first month, twice in the next, and again in the third, would probably be followed by a demand for one hundred in the month to come. And Jesse Bullen's purse could not stand this. After a year or

two he *must* fail — borrow money as he would, it could not last long. And then——? 'Why, then would happen just what he was averting now,—ruining himself to avert. It must come sooner or later.

Jesse Bullen writhed when he thought of the worry and gnaw and perplexity he had brought upon himself. He could not stand worry and trouble. And then he tried to show how he had not brought it upon himself—not altogether. Circumstance, temptation, Providence—ah, holy Providence! it is sad what is laid by irreverent humanity to thy share.

Jesse Bullen, it is true, was neither a criminal, nor contemplating any crime. No secret marriage stood between him and Mistress Judith : he had taken care in man-fashion to sin respectably if he sinned : paying due regard to his convenience hereafter. Neither was he a forger nor a perjurer. And yet he was suffering, and by his own fault. That he was not any of these and yet suffered, was a proof to Jesse that he suffered unjustly. Criminals ought to suffer: but a little carelessness, a false step, a mistake—surely that was not deserving of such a punishment. And it is a punishment indeed, to see that long lane which has no turning, or turns suddenly, abruptly, into a slough of despond.

Jesse Bullen, with all his respectability, had taken a false step: he was tied hand and foot by meshes there was no escaping.

And there lay the Parson's letter unanswered before him.

He considered a long time, and then he wrote.

In a few days, the Parson's answer came back:—

“DEAR LAD—I don't understand the difficulty you hint at in giving me your promise in legal form of the two thousand. I am a bit of a business man myself, and like sticking to forms in all cases. But in this case I know well enough who I am dealing with to put it by, and trust to you that nothing is more amiss than what you say. There will be no occasion for me to look over the Farm accounts with your mother, because she tells me, and you tell me, that all is well there. You will have plenty of money with God's blessing, and my child has no foolish tastes to burden you with. I shall therefore pay you yearly during my lifetime the sum of one hundred pounds, and eight thousand is already settled upon Judith, to be payable at my death.

“Nothing remains for you now but at your convenience to settle with her the day for your marriage. The earlier the better: but she will want a month or

three weeks' notice, to bid farewell to her poor folk, and to prepare her old father for the loss of her. May God bless you, dear lad ; and I am, yours truly,

“JOHN INGNEY.”

Parson Ingrey, a man of few words, and very tender-hearted under his thick coat of reserve, felt quite uncomfortable after he had written the letter and posted it. That sentence about “trusting there was nothing more amiss” might have been left out : when had the lad ever done anything to deserve *distrust*? The Parson was getting happier in his mind about the bills, seeing all the accounts were satisfactory, and Jesse had sold no timber even, laid no burden on the Farm as yet.

No news, but the news of the death of one man, could give great relief to Jesse Bullen. But the Parson's letter gave him as much as he could expect from any quarter. The idea of the two thousand was off his mind.

Poor Mistress Judith : the two thousand would not be for her. But it might stave off the crash a while longer. Two thousand in settlements would be out of Jesse's reach : now he could use it as he would.

“It will stave it off from her,” said Jesse, not too selfish sometimes to think of the girl he loved from

the bottom of his heart : but far too selfish to think of going to her, confessing everything, giving her up. Giving her up !—what would that mean but giving her to Amos ?

No, no : the thing to be considered now was how soon the wedding could possibly be. He must secure Mistress Judith soon, or she might be put out of his reach. It was a case of sitting upon gunpowder : and there was no knowing what any day might bring forth.

So he wanted to write to Judith and say “let it be in three weeks’ time.” It seemed easy enough, and yet here he was hindered. He had his reasons for not wishing that Paxton Dick should know that any time was fixed upon. Paxton Dick was too deep in his confidence already. And if the day were fixed, it would be over the village in the twinkling of an eye. And then there would be three weeks for Paxton Dick and a more dangerous man than he, to do their work.

What work Jesse hardly knew ; but he could not help fearing.

Finally, saying to himself that he was a coward, he wrote to Judith and asked her to fix the day. He could get a week’s leave somehow for the wedding.

And his heart gave a great throb of hope when he thought that, come what might hereafter, in three weeks' time Judith would be his wife.

And, once his wife, she would never forsake him. Jesse knew her well enough for **that**.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE CLOUDING OF THE SKY.

IT was just ten days before the wedding, which was fixed for an early day in August. Mistress Judith was sitting in Master Hurst's garden, hemming a tucker. It was all the assistance she had given as yet to the trousseau.

But to-day Mistress Bullen and she were going to Cambridge to buy the wedding-gown.

Master Hurst was very woeful, because his lady would be ta'en away. Mistress Hurst "hoped there weren't very rough ways and that at the army," and that Master Hurst would not forget "all the good words as his lady had larned him, but moind and keep on moinding the consekences of sin, and that."

Mistress Judith was half sad, half glad. Her eyes filled when she looked at the old man, who kept saying, with feeble shakes of his bald head, that he would never see her not no more—not till he see'd her in the good place, where through the mercy of God he hoped to go.

"I be drawing off, missus," he would say; "I be drawing off to death. The Lord he'll not forget me not much longer now."

But when Mistress Judith grew sad, she tried to think of the wedding-gown it was time to buy. Not that she cared very much for the gown itself, whether it were silk, satin, or stuff, so long as Jesse liked it; but the wedding-gown was like a talisman to her. The tears dried from her blue eyes as dew from violets when the sun shines.

It was settled that it was to be a white muslin dress, frilled and tucked a little, that was all. Then there was some lace of her mother's that was to be put on the sleeves and bodice; and there was to be no wreath, only such flowers as were out in her garden. The village children were far more concerned in the matter of dress than Mistress Judith. They were getting new bibs and tuckers, new ribbons in their hats, and all manner of innocent conceits. For if ever there was to be a great day in Haslington, it would be the day that joined the two families at the Rectory and Trotter's End.

While she sat hemming, talking fitfully to Master Hurst, and thinking of Jesse and her new life, Mistress Judith was on the look-out too for her father, who had gone to fetch Mistress Bullen in the pony-chaise,

and was then to pick her up at the Rectory gate. She had got her purse with fifty fat sovereigns in it: never had she been so rich and never so happy before. "When I'm married, I'll tell father how I was betrothed to Jesse those weeks before he told our secret," said Mistress Judith, who still thought sometimes, with a pang, of that untold tale. But now she could think of it almost without a pang—"when I'm married" seemed a cure for all ills. Everything would be well when only she was married. So she felt in her purse for the fifty fat sovereigns that were to be spent on clothes, and seemed so unspendable. How could she possibly spend fifty pounds?

The hot sun kept pouring down on her head as she sat there; the tall white garden lilies growing up about her, and peas and honeysuckle tumbling over the porch and paling, and scenting all the air. And there were Master Hurst's bees booming up and down, up and down, whirling round Judith's head sometimes—bent over the tucker—as if they mistook her for a flower.

And Master Hurst sat beside her, lifting his stiff knees now and then with very feeble hands, and watching the small fingers that plied the needle. Mistress Judith was not used to any work but knitting. She had no patience for slow sewing: and her

lips pouted a little now and then over her task. Unbearable task it would have been, but that the tucker was going into a gown that Jesse would see—a gown that she would not wear till she was a proud matron. She had no sun-bonnet on; Ruth had said she must not go to Cambridge in a sun-bonnet: so the sun felt hot enough in Master Hurst's garden.

At last she heard, not wheels, but a step at the garden gate. She started up when she saw her father's face. There was something in it that frightened her.

“What is it, father? Is Jesse——”

“Come here, my dear,” said the Parson; “Jesse is well enough. But you cannot go to Cambridge to-day.”

“Oh, father—have you lost money? I can do with much less than fifty pounds—here, take it again, father.”

“No, no,” he answered; but Judith saw the distress upon his face as they went into the house together. The hall was dark and shadowy after the hot bright sun outside. Mistress Judith stopped upon the threshold, not liking the shadows and the chill. But she had to follow, to hear the tidings whatever they might be. She did not care very much, now that she knew all was well with Jesse. And yet it seemed to her

that her life had taken a turn just then: that never again would she sit in the full sun of happiness.

"What is it, father?" she asked; "why can't we go to Cambridge?"

"Because Mistress Bullen is engaged elsewhere. She is making a move from Trotter's End to-day. She will want my carriage."

"A move?" Judith stood aghast, and the tucker fell from her fingers on to the window seat. "Is Jesse going to live there then,—are we to live there—do you think, father, after the marriage?"

"Perhaps," said the Parson, standing in the other window with his back turned.

Judith ran across the room and threw herself between him and the roses he was staring at.

"Oh, father, tell me the truth! why is your voice like that? what is the matter, father?"

"I don't know what," said he solemnly, "only I fear something is wrong, Judith. I must write to Jesse and see what can be done. I must understand this—I must understand this. Jesse never took a step like this before without telling me. Poor thing, poor thing! A bailiff coming in to manage the farm and turning her out. See that she is comfortable, Judith—she is coming here to-day."

But Judith had sunk down in a chair, and was watching her father silently with a white face.

"You'll put it right, father? You don't doubt Jesse? Oh, don't doubt him, father!"

But the Parson did not answer, He was writing to Jesse.

That evening, calm and patient as ever, Mistress Bullen came down in the Parson's pony-chaise to the Rectory. But before she came all Haslington knew that Jesse had put in a strange farm manager at Trotter's End; and that he "hadn't behaved right" by Mistress Bullen.

Mother and betrothed kept up appearances and courage as best they might before the Parson. A letter from Jesse saying the arrangement was only for a time, and apologizing for the inconvenience he must have given his mother, helped them not a little. It was not satisfactory, but it was something.

But when night came, and Judith was kissing Jesse's mother at the door of her own room, the pent-up tears burst forth.

"Let me call you mother, because you are Jesse's! I never knew mine," said Judith, sobbing on Mistress Bullen's shoulder. "And oh—do you think we shall be married on Thursday week? Do you think anything is coming between me and Jesse?"

Mistress Bullen steadied her voice, put her arms round Judith, and made answer bravely—

“God knows, dear heart—God knows. If your love is true, nothing can come between you. This is only a cloud, I hope—only a cloud, dear heart.”

“It is true!” said Judith, “it is true! nothing shall come between us. But you’ll stay with me for a little, won’t you? Do stay! I can’t go to sleep,” said she, looking at her bed. “I shall only have bad dreams and wake up frightened.”

So Mistress Bullen stayed. And before she left, Mistress Judith’s pale face was laid away in sleep, and her hand was put down softly by Mistress Bullen, who had held it.

It did not please Haslington folk well that that night Paxton Dick went up to Trotter’s End and paid a visit to the manager. If Paxton Dick had a finger in that pie, it must be of very evil cooking.

And Paxton Dick had a finger in it. He had done a deal of work, paid off one or two old debts handsomely. He grinned as he walked up to Trotter’s End, thinking how Amos had been baulked of his fair prize by just a little judicious intervention. Amos had said a nasty word or two to Paxton Dick: now they were quits.

But the Parson had to be paid out too. The

irons were in the fire. The first thorn had been planted.

And if Jesse must be sacrificed with the Parson, why that could not be helped. He had had a run of luck : now his star was not quite in the ascendant.

But how could the Parson—that idle, popular, calm Parson—be better touched than through Jesse?

And moreover Jesse's money, if it left his pockets, flowed into channels that wanted it now.

Paxton Dick chinked it in his trousers pockets as he went up the hill to spend his first evening at Trotter's End.

CHAPTER XXXV.

HARVESTING AGAIN.

NEVER had gloomier days been at Haslington than these of hot bright harvest. The sun shone, the corn turned into gold, the heavy sheaves fell under the scythe, and the carts went to and fro, while the trees snatched up their fringes from the wains, and adorned themselves, as if all was well.

But Haslington folk knew otherwise. No Bullens ruled now at the farm. All traces of the old rule seemed swept away. Mistress Bullen's sad face looked out of the Rectory windows, but Mistress Judith's looked out seldom or never. It was a week past the wedding day, and there was no talk of any wedding now.

It was natural after the first outburst of sympathy with Mistress Bullen and Mistress Judith, and the first laments over the old family that seemed so suddenly to have come to ruin, that Haslington folk should turn their thoughts to the practical aspect of the case, to its effect upon them and their prospects.

"The flies is very hattering," one would say grumbly, as they gleaned together.

"Ay—and the hot days—them and the flies be very terrifying to the children, they be. Let alone that there bean't no gleanin' not to speak of—not worth folks' while to break their backs for sich as this."

"Not's much as ud kiver a 'alf-crown," said another. "And no gleanin' not to speak of. Things was never this way before, was they, Mistress Gadd?"

"Not in my time—never at Trotter's End. Not so much as one field o' beans left for poor folk, what with the 'chining and raking and what not."

"And so light in the ear, Mistress Gadd, bean't it?"

"Ay, ay—but I be loight o' hearing, neighbour,—you needn't speak so loud. Master Amos, his time were a good time for poor folk."

"He were a terrible nice gentleman he were," said another.

"How be I heerd tell as *he* took to 'chines and sich like while he were in furrin parts," chimed in a woman who was on her knees tying up her bundle in its piece of sacking.

"'Chines or no 'chines," said Mistress Hurst, "he allows hisn to be gle'nt."

“Hear nothin’ now concernin’ the marriage or that, Mistress Hurst?” in a tone of inquiry.

Mistress Hurst wiped her eyes with her sacking, and looked mysterious, while she sighed.

“Ast no kestions I doan’t, and doan’t want to know nothing. Bean’t nought o’ good to hear as I take it.”

“Young missus, she be a-losing the blee off her, she be—niver see ’er out, not on a noice day nor nothin’—keeps to herself she do, and doan’t trouble no ’un she doan’t.”

“That’s right, neighbour, that’s quite right!” said a younger woman emphatically. “Doan’t trouble no one she doan’t, and we niver see her not this fourteen days, not since the first day o’ harvest, comin’ about the doors speaking so noice-like and genteel. ‘Well, Mistress Wib’dy,’ say she, ‘that be a noice gown,’ says she; ‘I moind for to have one as favours that when I go for to git my gowns,’ says she.”

“Poor heart! poor heart!” said several in a kindly chorus of sympathy, as they went home to the sound of the gleanng bell.

The manager of the farm stood at the gate as they passed out. Not one curtsey was dropped, not a look except of contempt and anger was cast upon him. But there he stood, and as the last woman passed out,

he took a key from his pocket and locked the gate ostentatiously.

As the long procession wound down the village, they were not blessings that were wafted back to him. He smiled, looked round him for a moment; then went into an adjoining field, where the men were still cutting, and called for the nearest hand.

“Take two sheaves there—carry them into the next field, and then fetch two more and put them beside them.”

“The women they be a-going to glean there to-morrow, master,” said the man sulkily.

“They won’t glean there to-morrow now, I take it. Carry in the sheaves there I tell you.”

He stayed to see them laid down, four sheaves, side by side in the middle of the field. Now no gleaner could go in until they were removed.

Next morning, when the gleaning bell rang at seven o’clock, and mothers and children hurried up to wait for each other at the gate of the field that had been all “carried” yesterday, every face fell. Four sheaves lay there: and there would be no gleaning to-day. No wonder poor folk at Haslington thought these were evil times.

Hardly less evil was it to the Parson, who suffered for his people, his child, and himself.

He had written to Jesse, and Jesse's answer had been unsatisfactory and shuffling. All would be well, he could not explain all the details of his affairs even to the Parson. The delay in the marriage he certainly should have thought unnecessary: but as it happened he could not get leave at the time they had fixed upon, so that in any case the marriage would have been postponed. But only for a short time, said Jesse; all would be well.

No one thought all would be well. And the Parson's heart failed him. In vain he tried to find out the position held by the new bailiff at the farm. Was he a bailiff, and if so in which sense? The Parson could not help fearing that Jesse's affairs had come to such a pass, that, as respectably as might be, he had made over the farm, for a time at least, to his creditors. It was bitter, bitter for the Parson to doubt his lad. But little by little doubt had forced itself upon him.

And the thing that pained him most was that, despite all his entreaties, his lad would not confess the worst, would not say what his debts were, would not put the whole thing into his (the Parson's) hands—nay, would not even allow that he was involved at all.

"Lad," wrote the Parson—"nothing shall go amiss with you, nothing shall come between you and Judith,

save a reasonable delay. Only you must tell me the whole truth, lad, and leave it all to me."

And when the Parson wrote that, he meant that neither time nor trouble nor money should be spared, if only Jesse, his dear dear lad, could be brought through.

"If there is no plain answer to this letter," said the Parson to himself, "I shall go to Dublin."

Instead of no *plain* answer came this time no answer at all.

And so, worn and harassed, but keeping up appearances lest people should ever think he doubted his lad, one hot day he set out in the pony-chaise from Haslington.

Only Mistress Bullen and Judith knew that he had gone to see Jesse.

And they looked after him wistfully with wan faces from the window.

Now they would soon know everything; and that would be well. Anything would be better than this long uncertainty.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MASTER HURST GOES.

SO the Parson went to Dublin. And it seemed to the two women waiting at the Rectory, that there was nothing left but that for them—to wait.

But God willed otherwise. And the morning after her father had gone, Judith was called to what was to be the death-bed of Master Hurst.

When she heard the news it startled her out of a heavy morning sleep: for very late the night before she had sat up brooding over the fire alone. They could not talk together that night, she and Mistress Bullen: it was a great pause of silence, in which they could listen for tidings, nothing more. Talking bettered nothing: every surmise was painful: and they could only hope and pray.

“Master Hurst had been took,” said Ruth, “took in the night. He could not speak clearly, but the neighbours thought he was asking for his ‘blessed lady.’ Would she mind the liberty they took in sending for her? Would she come?”

Of course the blessed lady would come. She sprang up, though her weary face and heavy eyes ill accorded with the quickness of her movements. And very soon she was at Master Hurst's bedside.

There sat Mistress Hurst, all the hard expression passed away from her face, crying copiously, in the arm-chair by the fire. And on his bed, quite motionless, lay Master Hurst.

When he heard Judith's step, and felt her shadow over him, he tried to turn his head, but failed. Only the dimmed eagle-eyes turned, dimmer than ever, and rested on her.

"I am so sorry to see you so," said Mistress Judith, laying her hand upon his shoulder and leaning over him, while her eyes filled with tears. Tears were very close at hand now for Judith.

"Don't speak," she said, "don't speak!" seeing his lips moved; and she drew the curtain aside and looked at him. His face was drawn on one side, and no more than a vague sound escaped him as he tried to answer her. It was a terribly sudden change, since the last day she had seen him, bright and cheery, sitting under his vine, watching the grapes ripen and the bees boom past.

"Are you happy?" asked she, presently, seeing it was no use to talk to him now of recovery as she

had so often done before. "Are you happy, Master Hurst?"

His eyes flooded with a quiet sunshine; he tried to move his head in feeble assent.

"I see you are," said Judith. "God takes care of you. You aren't sorry to go away to Heaven, Master Hurst? No; I know you aren't sorry. I understand, Jesus will take you there safely—through the dark valley."

He was lying motionless again, as if the power of hearing had left him. Judith turned to his wife.

"He is very happy, Mistress Hurst; you must think of that—he is thinking about going to Heaven already."

"I wish as I did know," sobbed the poor woman, rocking herself over the empty grate, and holding her apron over her face. "I wish as I *did* know what 'e thinks. I ast him, and ast him, but he doan't not say nothing, not to me. I'm sure I done all as I could, I done—tells him, I did, as how we must be sorry for our sins, and that, and all about the consequences of sin, and that. But whether he be right or wrong I doan't know. I done all I can, I done, ye see, and I can't not do no more, I can't."

"I am sure he is sorry for his sins," said Mistress Judith; "and I think it's time now to comfort him,

telling him about where he is going to. The time is past for telling him about the consequences of sin; don't you think so, Mistress Hurst? Shall we pray by him? Come and pray beside him together."

So they knelt down, the sobbing woman, in her threadbare gown, burying her head in the patchwork quilt that covered Master Hurst, the slim girlish figure of the girl beside her, resting her head with its crown of soft hair upon her hands, and both praying silently.

Presently Judith stood up and looked at him.

"He would understand," said she. "Is there any prayer you know, Master Hurst, that I could say for you?"

But he could not answer, and so aloud she prayed for him, while Mistress Hurst sobbed on.

"Into the dark valley take him! Out of this troublesome world, dear Lord, take him! Out of the dark valley, up the stair of Heaven, into thy Presence, O Father, take him! And soon let us all follow him. Amen."

But it was two days after this that the dark valley opened and the walk down it began.

Mistress Judith was again beside him. He had never spoken since the stroke seized him, and they had given up hoping for words. The power of swal-

lowing had become so feeble, that hardly anything would pass his lips : and now he had been three days almost without food.

It was drawing on to evening, and Mistress Judith was standing at the window watching the sun through the pollards at the Farm.

She was thinking how good it might perhaps be could she take Master Hurst's place, give him her life, and pass away before the evening. Two days before her thoughts would have been far otherwise ; for then she had still had hope. But now three days had passed and no message had come from Dublin. If all had been well, or better than they feared, her father had promised to telegraph. And no telegram had come. Judith had a presentiment that none would come ; that a great darkness would follow upon this twilight.

And so, with the intensity of her nature, she had opened her arms already for a great grief. And only because there was a great uncertainty, and a possible blow, she was ready to give up life, with all its treasures, only to be rid for ever of its ills. And then heaven was a reality to Mistress Judith. She had no more fear of dying just then than of falling asleep.

It was a faintly spoken word that called her to

herself and to Master Hurst. As she stood beside him, the words grew clearer.

“You can speak? Oh, I am so glad! You may get better still!”

He shook his head, and lifted up his thin hand, the only one that he could move, as if to pray. Then he looked at his other—a hand of stone now—beseechingly.

“Shall I lift it? so? Now you want to pray. Will you say ‘Our Father?’”

“Our Father,” he began tremblingly, and then tears like an infant’s rained over his withered cheeks, as word by word he said it all, with thick uncertain utterance.

“Is there anything else?” said Judith, still holding the cold hands together upon his heart. He nodded assent: and presently began to pray.

“Suffer us not—dear Lord—to fall away—through vain and foolish customs of the world.”

Then, without pausing, the Belief.

“I b’lieve in God the Father o’ the Allmighties,” he began. And Judith, seeing that his strength ebbed and that the words carried little meaning to him now, stopped him gently.

“Is there nothing else?” said she. “You have not got much longer time. Jesus is soon coming to take

you, Master Hurst. Is there nothing else you would like to say?"

He motioned that his hands should be held together again: and then repeated firmly—

“When now I lays me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep;
And if I die afore I wake,
I pray 'ee, Lord, my soul to take. Amen.”

The Angels in Heaven said “Amen.” For when Mistress Judith laid down his hands upon his heart, Master Hurst was dead.

And Mistress Hurst, wiping her eyes, ran out to “tell the bees.”

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE BLOW FALLS.

AND this was the news that the Parson heard when he got home, from village folk who stopped him on the way.

“Poor child, poor child!” said the Parson, thinking what evil tidings he had brought her, as if the death of Master Hurst had not been pain enough. She had never been used to pain had Mistress Judith. It never seemed natural that it should come to her.

The Parson hated scenes. And in all his own sore trouble and perplexity, the thought of the outburst of grief that would greet him, held its place. How should he tell them? how would it be best said? What should he do when both women broke down together, and he could not comfort them?

But he need not have feared. For in the first place, they read ill tidings in his face. In the second, there was no outburst of grief at all. Mistress Bullen cried silently, while Judith did not cry at all.

She had been bearing the blow little by little these

last few days. It hardly startled her that the Parson came back without seeing Jesse; that Jesse had left Dublin, without leave, without word or message, even to her.

It was well she did not break down under this blow: for that something heavier must come was certain.

And they had not long to wait for it. This was the way the news came at length.

The Parson left orders for Jesse's letters to be sent to him from Dublin. In the course of a few days one arrived, and the Parson opened it. Now the liabilities might be known at last. All might be well still; for if only the Parson knew the amount, what sacrifice would he not make to save Jesse? Selling Trotter's End would be nothing if the lad could be cleared, and set on his feet again. And after all debt was not so bad a thing for a young man, said the Parson, who had never owed a penny in his life. He began to think, as he opened the letter, that he had been unnecessarily troubled about Jesse.

This was the letter—

“DEAR JESSE—I do not see what I can do in reply to your letter, but give you such advice as I should wish to act upon myself. Undo the false step you have taken before it can be undone for you

by the rascal into whose hands you have placed yourself. The blow certainly hit me hard, though it is not the first I have had at your hand. You'll forgive me if I write bitterly, seeing I am human enough not to have forgotten that as easily as you do.

"This is not the time for reproaches, and especially, since you have told me your difficulties, I ought to be silent, save where I can help you.

"I wish yours were a common debt, that any payment of mine could set at rest and keep dark. As it is, nothing but telling the whole truth, and resigning your commission, can save you. Sooner or later that scamp who personated you at the examination will give tongue; in the meantime he is sucking your blood, and ruining you, and the old place.

"It is very little I can do for you. A few months ago I could have done less. I was fool enough then to think some one else's concerns were my own, and then I should have thought a long while before I opened my purse to you.

"But now money is nothing to me. I've got no home to look forward to, and you have. So take this four hundred pounds, and do what you will with it—only for God's sake make her happy. Lad, don't keep silence any longer: you owe it to your soul, to the Parson, and most of all to her, to speak out.

"I am writing to my mother, or rather I'll do so from Liverpool in a few days, to tell her I'm going to begin life in a new country. Take care of her till I come back, and let bygones be bygones.—Your affectionate

AMOS BULLEN."

Turning it backwards and forwards in his hands, backwards and forwards, sat Parson Ingrey with the letter in his hand.

This letter from Amos, illiterate, dull, cloddish Amos, who never got half through the "Delectus!" This letter to Jesse, his lad—his dear lad whom he trusted—this was to him!

The Parson could not tell how long he sat there, turning the letter to and fro, and staring at the window, past which the first yellow leaf of autumn was flying. Only it must have been a long time surely; for when he turned away Parson Ingrey was a much older man.

That same day, by the same post, came a letter from Amos, confirming what his letter to Jesse had said. He had gone to a new country to begin a new life. He would come back after a year or two, and then he and his mother would live together. It was a cheery, bright letter; such as Amos would have written to his mother, if heaven and earth were being torn from under him. And he said nothing of the

reason of his having to begin a new life, nothing of the four hundred pounds he had sent to Jesse.

Poor Amos, who thought this would set all things right—in whose eyes four hundred pounds meant such great things, and in whose hands they would have been turned to great things, if that blight had not fallen five months ago.

“I’m not generous,” said Amos as he closed his letter—“I only give to you, lad, when it’s turned to dross for me.”

Every day now seemed to bring bad tidings; every post was to be dreaded. Life in Haslington had changed, and sad or troubled looks were to be seen on every side. The very next day after Amos’ letters, came one which clenched the whole affair.

Mr. Crisp, attorney of Cambridge or the neighbourhood, had given information at the Horse Guards that Jesse Bullen had never passed the examination at Chelsea Hospital last spring. And Mr. Crisp had little difficulty in making his statement good, seeing that he could prove that he himself, John Crisp, had undertaken to represent Jesse Bullen, and had so done, passing fourth upon the list of names.

When asked by certain curious persons what his reasons had been for ruining a young man at the outset of life, Mr. Crisp had replied that he did not

mind allowing that his reasons were pecuniary. He had laid Mr. Bullen under great obligations to himself, and naturally Mr. Bullen became his debtor. It was a matter quite between Mr. Bullen and himself.

Immediately afterwards it was publicly notified that Jesse Bullen was cashiered. Mr. Crisp withdrew himself from the scene. No word or message came from Jesse.

Over Haslington folk, and the Rectory most of all, there fell a heavy gloom. And so began the short days and the long evenings of another winter.

The bailiff was turned out of Trotter's End, but only that the farm might be let. And over all these doings and upheavings Paxton Dick feigned great surprise.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

HOW THE "BLEE" WENT.

BUT folk at Haslington were not to be taken in so easily. Sundry little signs of increasing prosperity in Paxton Dick's way of living, helped to confirm their suspicions that he had done his best to assist the downfall of Gentleman Bullen. They all knew his spite to the Parson and to Amos ; and the idea of revenging himself on both would have been reward enough, they knew, to his ill nature, without the increase of income which they were sure he had derived from it. Two or three of the village men set to work to trace the steps Paxton Dick had taken in the matter : and they had plenty of ground to go upon, for the hawker had been seen a great deal in Master Bullen's company of late, had given him a letter or letters, had gone to Cambridge oftener than was necessary, and was good friends with the bailiff at the farm. Was not that evidence conclusive to honest Haslington men ? But they waited a while to make certainty sure, and to see how best they could pay out the hawker.

Meantime all hearts grew sad, seeing the changed face of Mistress Judith. She came to church as before, sat in the great pew beside the pulpit, lifted up her voice in the singing.

But it was a white white face now. It was true enough that the "blee" had gone from it, as simple folks said.

And children in the choir noticed that when sad hymns came, the face went down, and only the white forehead, with the fair hair drawn back from it, showed above the pew. And then a very sweet bell in that peal of young voices failed: and Mr. Cocks behind the barrel organ missed it, but neither looked up nor wondered.

Master Hurst was laid away in the grave, and no white head looked out across at the lattice window. And soon the ground was carpeted with leaves, yellow and red damp leaves from the bare poplars. And then the snow began to fall slowly and softly, and before Christmas all the ground was hidden away like Master Hurst.

Every one wondered who would "set out" the church this Christmas. No Gentlemen Bullen now, no Master Amos. Only Mistress Judith: and would she do it this year?

Mistress Judith would do it. It was sore enough

for her standing there with school-children and Mr. Cocks to help her, where last year Jesse had been. Tying garlands round the same pillars, using the very ropes his hands had tied and twisted. And then how meaningless it was now : decorating meant joy, and there was no joy this Christmas : this cold, bleak, silent, pitiful Christmas.

But after a while Mistress Judith blamed herself greatly. Christmas joy had nothing to do with her joys and sorrows. Christ came for all the world, not for her only. There would be joy in Heaven to-morrow, on His birthday, however sore her heart might be.

But this did not comfort her. It was not till Mistress Bullen, reading the sorrow in her eyes, and chafing her hands when she came back from the cold church to the study fire, spoke to her of it, that she began to see things differently.

"Dear heart," said gentle Mistress Bullen, "Christmas has come very sadly to you. But remember He came for other things than joy, dear heart—for other things than joy."

"What things?" asked Judith sadly, looking at the fire.

"For sinners," said Mistress Bullen, and then she lowered her voice—"for such as him."

Mistress Judith knelt down and laid her head on Mistress Bullen's lap. That was true, very true. There was something else to be hoped for in the world than only joy. She was doing wrong perhaps in thinking only of her sorrow. Christ came to save sinners: and Jesse, her love, was one of these. Christmas could not be altogether so sad a time if it minded her how Christ could save Jesse.

It was the first time that any hope had come to her since the great blow fell. So utterly stunning had it been that hope had been crushed out. Jesse, untrue, deceiving, leading a false, false life. Mistress Judith, who loathed a lie, who knew nothing meaner, more cowardly than lying, could never deceive herself, not even about Jesse. She could make no excuse for him: if she had, she would have been less true.

But in all the sea of sorrow there was one raft to which she clung. Jesse had not deceived *her*, had loved her all through—nothing unholy or dishonest had come, at least, athwart their love. He had been her one love, she had been his. He was gone away, it is true, and had never written, had never sent her a word or message. But that was only for a while, only while the shame was too strong upon him. After a while he would remember her promise, how

she would never forsake him, come what might. Then he would come back to her, her own own love, her Jesse : a sinner, but still her betrothed, still to be her husband some day soon.

With true woman's instinct she turned and clung to him now more passionately than ever. If others shunned him, then all the more he needed her. If he had sinned, then all the more he needed her.

And all her grief (beyond the trouble of his guilt) was that she could not reach him now. Where to write to him, to send to him, to go to him—no one knew.

Only heaven and earth were moved to find him. By the newspapers, by agents, by inquiry offices, by letters sent aimlessly to Dublin, to post offices abroad: by all means possible, probable, and improbable the Parson tried to find Jesse.

At length Mistress Judith felt certain that some letter or paper must have reached him. He might be a great way off; she must allow some time for his journey. But Jesse must be on his way to her. He must have remembered her promise, must know that she at least was true.

Poor little Judith, who did not know that the untruthful doubt truth itself, seeing through glasses darkly.

But hope and waiting helped the long winter through. The round of days, Christmas, Plough Monday, Valentine's Day, went by ; and there came no news from Jesse.

All the buds filled with rising sap, and the snow melted from Judith's rose-trees. The ivy on the church shook itself in the March winds, and snow-drops made room for primroses. And very soon the cuckoo came, far-off, crying out that the spring was come.

But Mistress Judith looked neither at the rising sap nor at the roses ; and the cuckoo meant very little in her ears, who used to love the coming of the spring so well.

Out and in of the cottages she went all the day, for sitting at home had become unbearable. Foul weather or fine she went, went early and stayed late.

And they asked her no questions, those simple folk. Something in her face silenced them : even Mistress Hurst kept her peace, or talked of her dear man that was gone, and not of Jesse Bullen.

And when she came home late, chilled and damp, but always still and patient, Mistress Bullen would reproach her tenderly.

"I will take care," said Mistress Judith, "I will take

care, for his sake. If he came back you know and found me ill, it would never do, would it?"

At which Mistress Bullen would keep silence. Would Judith love him still, if he came back? would it be well for Judith?

The next day she would try and take the counsel of Jesse's mother. But when the mail-boy came and brought no letter, she could bide no longer in the gloomy house.

And after many long outings and many chills, Mistress Judith was used to bring a cough home with her. Not much, only it troubled her a little in the night, and broke her rest a little.

And fast, fast, the "blee" was going from her.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

“TIN-KETTLING.”

ALL through the summer it was the same thing. Waiting, disappointment, and sorrow.

One little event took place that made considerable stir in Haslington village. But no rumour of it came to the Parson, who sat in his study down-hearted and absent over his books, and noticed nothing unusual coming through the night air.

Haslington folk could stand it no longer. It was all very well for the Parson to preach about Christian charity, but it was said somewhere in the Bible that the ungodly must have their reward. Some one must give the reward, said Haslington folks: it was not likely that the Almighty would bestir himself about such as Paxton Dick. And if He had meant to, they had given Him time enough. It was certain that Haslington folk were called upon to punish Paxton Dick.

“The Parson, as kerried ’s years so loightly,” said one of the ringleaders, “pulled down, spoilt-like, all

the heart taken out of him, so to speak. Mistress Judith, why, as to her—there she were, sick-like, favoured a ghost more than a body.”

“So she be,” said another, kicking a small unripe apple with his clumsy foot. “There, that be yours, Abraham, bean’t it?”

“Only a cas’alty apple,” was the answer; but the wife who spoke stooped down and put it in her apron, while she went on talking about Mistress Judith.

“Should be taken keer of, she should. I’d make summit as ’ud set her right, so as she ’d tak it. I’ve a moind to ast her, I have.”

“There be that bottle as the gent gave you for your bad foot; try that on, won’t you?” said her husband, with a laugh.*

“Well, and moight do worse, she moight. Beautiful rings as he had on ’is fingers, he had, and, says he, ‘I see well enow what ails *you*,’ says he. And hed his kerridge and all standing out over the door, and says he——”

But unceremoniously the husband dragged his mate away, for there were to be great doings that night.

All the women stood at their doors listening, while twenty or more stout men, in smocks and corduroys, tramped up from the inn towards the hawker’s cottage.

Fifty boys or so swelled the train as they went up. One or two women more curious than their neighbours hung about the outskirts of the crowd, carrying their babies.

Like a swarm of bees, they gathered round the doomed door. There was a silence. The hawker's white head and bleary-eyes showed at the window.

This was the signal. On the instant an unearthly noise of hooting, cries, and beating of tin-kettles, pails, pans, anything, was struck up.

Nearly an hour the serenade lasted. But no face re-appeared at the window.

"There bean't no back door, be there?" said one of the men, suddenly struck by the idea that the wily hawker had escaped them. There were no back doors to the houses on a line with Paxton Dick's. But there was no saying what he might not have done for himself.

There was a loud cry when a lad announced lustily that he had got in through the kitchen window, and that in the same way the hawker must have got out, for the house was empty.

Then they gave chase. Like a hunted hare Paxton Dick dodged and doubled all up the Cambridge road. But fifty honest men and boys were a match for him.

He was caught, well thrashed by the stoutest man of the party, and sent out of Haslington. And glad enough he was to escape (his pockets being well lined), for far behind him, long after he was lost to sight, he heard the noise of his enemies' uncouth cymbals.

And that was how Paxton Dick was "tin-kettled" and turned out. And he deserved his fate: for sure enough he had brought Jesse Bullen into the meshes of Mr. Crisp, and had replenished his pockets comfortably.

And then, as before said, came the long hot summer, which brought no Jesse and no tidings. Amos wrote sometimes to his mother, cheery letters always: but as yet he seemed to have got no letter from her, and he knew nothing of Jesse's disappearance.

Towards autumn there came a letter from him however, saying he hoped that their anxiety was over, and that Jesse had turned up. He could not stay away for long, that was certain, said Amos, who nevertheless was self-banished. But then he was not Jesse: he was not betrothed to Mistress Judith.

The Parson had his four hundred pounds safe, and told his mother to tell him so. And in time he sent his message of thanks back again: and hoped by this time they had good tidings of Jesse. He wished the

four hundred had been in time to be of use: but no doubt things were best as they were, bad as they seemed. So wrote Amos cheerfully from Australia in letters that took three months to come, and that Mistress Bullen read in the quiet of her own room. For none but she cared for Amos, her darling, her Benjamin: she and God, said Mistress Bullen, thinking of how he had been kept in straight paths all through, though God had chastened him. She knew now why he had to begin a "new life:" she knew how he had repaid good for evil to his brother. No wonder she brooded over his letters, and, like that Mother blessed above women, kept his sayings in her heart.

Sometimes, as the end of the first year of Jesse's disappearance drew nigh, she could not help the oft recurrence of a thought which she felt wrong in harbouring. If Jesse should persist in staying away—if after a long time Amos should come home—would Judith ever come to love Amos and forget Jesse?

The thought came: but Mistress Bullen drove it from her. It was not a loyal thought for her to have, who should cling to Jesse as his betrothed was doing. So she reasoned.

Poor little betrothed, whose face had grown so changed and wan; who did not pick up with sun and

warmth as her father hoped she would : who still looked out for the mail-boy day by day, and still day by day was left un comforted.

It was cruel of Jesse, very cruel, said Mistress Bullen now, when the sad eyes of Judith haunted her. It was not what she would do, said she again, if she were in the place of Jesse.

So the year passed by, and once again the leaves began their falling. A silence fell upon the name of Jesse, upon the subject which was nearest to their lips. For what use was it to speak ? Had they not said everything to comfort themselves and found no comfort ?

And then, as winter came on, the thought that Mistress Bullen tried to banish struggled again into existence. Jesse had been false, had forsaken Judith. If Amos came back, if Judith little by little could know all, would she not be brought at length to love him ? Mistress Bullen's heart leapt when she thought of it ; for all she had lost her eldest born, and looked for him daily, and found life so utterly sad.

One night, a winter night, when the Parson was in his study—and he was much given to sitting alone there now-a-days, for the face of Judith smote him sorely—Mistress Bullen sat over a letter to her youngest son.

Over the fire, an open book upon her lap, sat Judith. But her eyes were beyond the book, fixed on the coals, from which a tiny flame was spurting.

"Mother," said she suddenly (she had learnt to call her mother), "are you writing to Amos?"

Mistress Bullen started, and the more when in answer to her "Yes," Judith went on—

"There's no chance of his coming home, is there? If not, mother, will you send him a message from me?"

"Yes, dear heart" (trying to be calm and not at all astonished).

"Say then, mother—that if we never meet again, I hope he will do one thing for me."

"Yes, dear heart."

"If he would look for Jesse, mother, supposing"—and her voice trembled—"Jesse should not come back soon—not before——"

"Before what?" said Mistress Bullen, coming towards her and kneeling down.

"Before I die, mother," said Mistress Judith, breaking down suddenly. "O mother—I know I can't live long now—not very long."

"My darling, my darling!" It was all Mistress Bullen could say.

"Would you see Amos if he came?" said Mistress Bullen presently.

"Oh yes! I should like to see him. They take a long time going out there, don't they? the letters I mean? Would he come home, do you think, mother, if he thought I was dying?" she said wistfully, thinking of how he had spurned her when she had been in health, of late times, and how he might refuse to come now.

"He would come for a kind word from you, dear heart—he would come if it would comfort you. Would it?"

"Yes," said Mistress Judith tearfully. It was no time now to think if Amos had been unkind. All that must be forgotten now. If he could come home—(and he had only talked of going for a year or two)—ah, then, if Jesse did not come, she could leave a message with Amos. He would find him out and bring him home.

Just then the Parson came in: the Parson who hated scenes. And Mistress Bullen got up, and with trembling fingers wrote to Amos.

"I think if you would come soon, dear son, you might be a comfort to her. She is very down-hearted, and she bid me ask you whether you would come. She is very sickly this winter, but nothing to fear. I think, knowing how it all has been, it would be well for you to come."

Was that too much hope for him? Mistress Bullen hoped not.

She did not hear Judith by the fire saying to herself, as she rocked to and fro, "Jesse's brother! my own love's brother! I must have no hard thoughts of him now."

Mistress Judith was preparing herself for Heaven. For, though others did not know it, she knew that she had taken many steps down into the dark valley where her mother and Master Hurst had gone before.

CHAPTER XL.

A HOME-COMING.

IT was fully six months from this night when Mistress Bullen and Judith sat together and talked of Amos—six months from the falling of those sad leaves which had buried the first year of Jesse's absence: and there had been no tidings of Jesse.

Once or twice the Parson thought he had caught a glimpse of hope, a ray of possibility; but the pale trace had always waned and faded, and nothing had come of it.

Only Judith believed that Jesse would still come, and might come any day. As for the Parson and Mistress Bullen their sorrow had almost turned to wrath. For that some message had reached Jesse, at the further ends of the world even, was certain. He must be staying away willingly, knowing what he was causing a home of suffering, and too cowardly to face his people again.

And there was Judith failing day by day, growing whiter and thinner, and still trying to be calm and

patient, not to trouble any one, and vexed that she was so sickly and ailing, chiefly because it was a cause of grief to her father and to Jesse's mother.

She did not steadily decline from week to week and month to month. In summer her cough troubled her less ; she could sit out in the garden in the warm part of the day, and look at her roses.

That was last summer. Here was April round again, and Mistress Bullen looked at her and wondered whether she would be able to do it now, when warm days should come round.

And she could not help doubting, for of late there had been a marked change. Instead of the restlessness of her first days of sorrow, Judith sank into a state of apathy at times, when it seemed impossible to arouse her to interest. But sometimes when trying would fail entirely, of her own free will she would get up from her sofa suddenly, seeing her father or Mistress Bullen looking sad, and atone as best she could for what seemed to her great selfishness and want of thought for them.

To-day, as Mistress Bullen sat silently knitting by Judith's sofa, the warm April sun came flooding over them through the poplars, just powdered over with their first yellow green.

The window was open, and the fresh sweet smell

from the awakening garden was wafting in upon Mistress Judith as she lay.

It brought back to her all too plainly those days of spring when she and her betrothed had gone hand in hand through the woods together, gathering primroses that had filled and overflowed her basket, and that were what no earthly primroses could ever be again. For if Jesse came back, if they were married before another spring came round, and if they went again to Primrose-Spinney (and here Mistress Judith unconsciously moved her foot to see whether indeed she could ever get to Primrose-Spinney again, and her heart fell, seeing how heavy and powerless it was), still never again could she be what she had been that day when Jesse in her eyes was just and true, and she knew nothing of sin except in Paxton Dick, and when she had given that promise that seemed to her as binding as any marriage vow could be—

“Whatever happens I will never forsake you, Jesse, neither in this world, nor in the world to come.”

Lying on her sofa to-day, the wreck of what she had been once, and brought so low by the sins of Jesse, Judith clasped her hands and said to herself, “Amen.”

“Did you speak, dear heart?” said Mistress Bullen.

“No, mother.”

"If you knew how it comforts me to hear you call me that," said Mistress Bullen, her voice trembling a good deal, as she knitted faster. She wanted to say something, and did not know how to say it. She had caught at the first straw, and now kept silence not knowing how to speak further.

"Dear heart," said she at length, summoning up her courage—"do you ever think what it will be if Jesse bides away, and forsakes you altogether?—do you ever think that if one who had loved you longer, and loved you truer, were to come——"

Judith had started up from her pillow; she was leaning forward now and bending down her ear towards the window.

"Hold your peace," she said, "he won't bide away—for ever. I hear him at the door. I heard his step, I know."

"Dear heart, have patience," said Mistress Bullen, trying to lay Judith's head back upon the pillow. "You've so often thought it was he before to-day."

"Gen'leman asking for Mistress Bullen," said Ruth in an agitated whisper at the door.

Mistress Bullen moved to the door, held it open a moment and looked out. But before she could speak or stop him, some one had pushed past her into the room.

With white face and eyes large with a sorrowful wild intensity of expectation, Mistress Judith had sat upright on her sofa, holding the wrapper that was over her with thin clenched hands.

At the sound of footsteps she spread out her white arms, gave a low moan of stifled joy, then with a loud cry of triumph—

“And you have come!—my Jesse!—my own love! And they said you would forsake me——”

But Mistress Judith’s head sank back upon the pillow, and the cry of triumph changed suddenly to a wail of pain.

For there, within reach of her outspread arms, watching the horror of disappointment that had come upon her face, hearing the words that would have greeted another, stood Amos, with the low wail of pain that was his greeting ringing in his ears.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE END.

AND now, from day to day and hour to hour, the strength of Mistress Judith waned and passed.

First of all *she* knew it : knew that before many months had gone Haslington folk would be carrying her across the garden, as they had carried Master Hurst.

That was long ago—long months ago. But next Haslington folk knew it, after Amos had come home. They were good judges : they read in his face that there was no hope that Mistress Judith would ever cross their doors again.

And last of all, the Parson knew it. It was a long time travelling to his brain. She had sickened, she was ill—she had never been so before ; but die !—was it possible ? said the Parson—could he live, live on perhaps for long years, and Judith die !

But at last he too believed it. For as the summer days drew on, there came no summer to Mistress

Judith. Only into her face there came a look that carried the truth straight and fast to the Parson's heart. It was the look Judith's mother had worn when death was laying his hand upon her. The likeness had been faint before between the mother and the child. But now as he looked at her, and went off in his own fashion into misty dreams, he often wandered back into his life, lived twenty years ago again, saw Judith lying in the nurse's arms, felt the old blank come back upon him, missed woman's hands about his study table—and then awoke : awoke to find Judith his daughter lying by him; his daughter who would never be bride to any one but Death.

And already the old blank was coming, in strange new reality : and once again about his study table he missed a dear woman's ways and fingers. No scissors now agape upon the Plato—no thread entangled all about his feet. For only her own room with the lattice window saw Mistress Judith now.

Haslington "Feast" came again and went : and it was two days after, while roses and honeysuckle and all June flowers were blowing that the news went out in all the village that Mistress Judith was "drawing off to death."

Mistress Hurst ran out across the way earlier than on other days. She had kept watch off and on for

long weeks past : she and Mistress Bullen, Ruth, the Parson, and Amos.

When one was tired out with watching or with nursing, another came, and the place at the sickbed was never empty. And foremost among them all, always ready to go a message, to read, to bring Mistress Judith flowers, was Amos.

“ You should tell her, dear son,” said Mistress Bullen one day, when Judith seemed rallying a little. “ Tell her how long you loved her—and how true——”

But “ Oh, mother, mother ! ” was Amos’s only answer. That wail of pain, that look that met him when he first came home—how could they be forgotten ? *His* love ! what was that to Mistress Judith, who loved Jesse, who had given Jesse her promise long ago : and who was passing now beyond all earthly loves and promises ?

So, waiting upon her, and blessing God that he could be near her now who had so long been driven from her, Amos held his peace.

It was hard enough sometimes. Once, when it seemed to come across her, that in her grief at not finding Jesse standing there beside her, she might have wounded Amos—she called him to her, and said, holding out her hand—

“ I’m very hard on you and all here, Amos. Trouble

has made me think too much about myself. I've often grieved since, thinking how much I hurt you when I cried for pain, thinking it was Jesse coming through the door. But it was not that I was vexed to see you, Amos—you won't think that, will you? Because, though there was a strange coldness between us for a long while, and I took it very much to heart at first, when you never came to see me—what is it, Amos?—were you going to speak?—Well, wait a minute because my breath's very short to-day—it's been so since the last cold I took. And get up, Amos, don't kneel upon the hard floor and look so strange—you don't feel ill, do you, Amos?—Ah, I was going to say that, spite of all that, I feel it's all passed by, and that you had some good reason to be angry with me. Don't stop me, Amos, because I can't speak much longer, and it lies so at my heart, I want to speak it out. And I want to say I love you—as my dear brother, Amos—as my dear love's brother—and he and I are one, you know. I gave him my promise that I would never forsake him come what might. *You* think I'm right, Amos. You wouldn't think it right for me to give him up, would you? Nor the thought of him? even now, when I'm going so fast?"

So at last the end came. There they stood round her, that sad company, watching her breathing, that had been quick and laboured all the night.

Mistress Hurst sat upon the end of the bed, wiping her eyes with her black apron.

“Don’t cry, Mistress Hurst,” said Judith. “You’re used to people going away like this. You know when Master Hurst went, father told us—he only went for a long journey. I’m going a journey too—only I think I’m half-way through the journey—it won’t be so long for me—I’ve been a great while on the road. And, mother—you mustn’t cry much after I’m gone. I know you keep back your tears for the sake of me. Mother—I would like to speak to Amos—is Amos here?”

“He is outside the door, dear heart—shall I bid him come in?”

She nodded assent.

Then she wandered. And Amos, gaunt and pale, stood waiting beside her.

For a long time her eyes were fixed upon the ceiling. Now and then she frowned with a pained look, as if she saw, and wanted to see more clearly. At last, turning her head restlessly, she looked at Amos. When she recognised him, she burst into tears.

Then she grew calm again. Mistress Bullen

took a handkerchief, and wiped the tears from her cheeks.

"Thank you," she said very feebly, and then they heard her say "Amos!"

He stooped down and put his ear close to her mouth.

"You'll see him—by and by—and bring him home. You'll tell him I was very true to him. You'll bid him pray to Jesus—to forgive——"

Then her breath failed, but after a moment, with a struggle, she said—

"You'll not be hard on him—*don't* let folk say he killed me—it's not true, it's not true—I want——"

And then there was a silence that was never broken.

Once she looked round, as for some one. Her father came nearer and held her hand. But he had no words, and it was Mistress Bullen who said calmly—

"You'll meet him in Heaven, dear heart. Are you happy now, sweet love?"

She had fixed her eyes on her father, with a beautiful quiet smile. It was all the answer they wanted. And after an instant she looked up, high above their heads, and her lips moved.

"Do you see anything, dear heart?" asked Mistress Bullen softly.

“Some one—in white——” And the smile deepened and overflowed her eyes that had already taken their first look into the valley that is called Dark.

Mistress Hurst leaned forward, staying her sobs.

“Was it like the blessed Saviour, my dear—all shining and glorious, and that?”

But from Mistress Judith came no answer. The some one in white had taken her away.

Two years after, on a winter night, came a knock at the door of Trotter's End

The Parson, Mistress Bullen, and Amos were sitting round the fire: for Trotter's End was home to them all now.

They got up, drew the curtain, undid the shutter, and looked out.

In the light that streamed from the window they could see a man standing in the rain.

At the sight of faces at the window he moved back. But they had all seen his face.

And it was Amos who went out and opened the door.

“Have I atoned, brother?” asked Jesse's voice, before he would come a step further. “Is she yours now, lad? God knows I've given you time—surely, I've given you time!”

They stood looking at each other—dark shadows, half lighted by the pale flood from the open door. There was a long silence. Then Amos said,—

“And *that* was why you bode away?”

“Why else, lad ; why else ? It was the least I could do—to set her free—and leave her for you, lad.”

There was another long silence, longer than the last.

“But she died,” said Amos.

And then he drew Jesse in, and closed the door.

THE END.]

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